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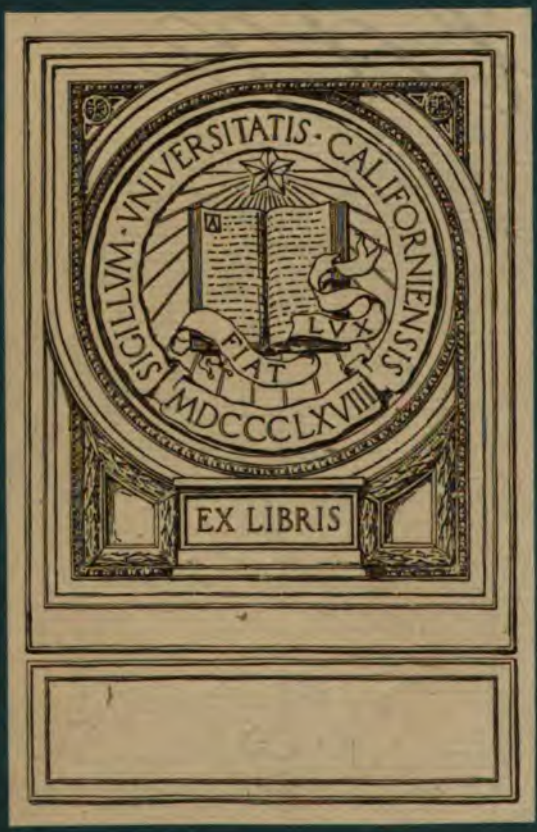
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WITH GENERAL FRENCH AND THE CAVALRY IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Lieut Gen. Sir John D'E French, K.C.B.

WITH GENERAL FRENCH AND THE CAVALRY IN SOUTH AFRICA

BY

CHARLES SYDNEY GOLDMANN

(Acting as Special Correspondent with the column of Sir Redvers Buller in Natal, and later with the army of Lord Roberts in the South African campaign)

London

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED

NEW YORK: THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1902

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TO

A. M. G.,

TO WHOM I STAND INDEBTED FOR A VALUED

EXPERIENCE THAT HAS BEEN ADDED TO MY LIFE,

AND THAT HAS HELPED ME TO

A MORE EXACT APPRECIATION OF OUR

SOLDIERS IN THE FIELD

255217

PREFACE

THE purpose of this book is to follow the fortunes of our cavalry in the South African War, omitting the Natal campaign, and dealing chiefly with the work of the mounted troops under the leadership of Lieutenant-General Sir John French.

The rôle of cavalry in war has always had a certain glamour about it. Since the day when Seidlitz's charging squadrons overthrew the proudest fighting men of Europe; since Murat, a brilliant figure at the head of an unrivalled cavalry, helped to win the crown of empire for the first Napoleon, the horseman in war has had a peculiar fascination both for the military student and the ordinary reader of history. No incident of the Crimean War has more stirred the imagination than the heroic, if useless, sacrifice of Cardigan's brigade at Balaklava; and no episode of the Franco-German War will remain longer in the memories of men than the desperate charge by which Von Bredow's squadrons retrieved the day at Rezonville. Indeed, it would be difficult to overestimate the effects that cavalry has produced on the course of events in past campaigns. In the Boer War the horse-soldier has borne a part which must always be writ large in its chronicles. General French's dashes

on Kimberley and on Koedoesrand will take their place in military annals among the most notable achievements of which cavalry can boast.

Broadly speaking, however, the cavalryman in South Africa has been deprived of much of the brilliancy and picturesqueness which were invariably his on previous battle-grounds. He has not been able to rejoice in the tumult of the charge, to over-ride in close-knit masses the opposing squadrons of his enemy, to thunder with loose rein and bloody spur upon disorganised and shaken infantry, nor to descend like a thunderbolt upon his foeman's guns, and sweep triumphantly through disordered ranks. The only part of the recognised duty of the horseman which has fallen to his lot has been the reconnaissance under conditions exceptionally dangerous, the extended patrol, the quest for a cunning enemy, and the swift and hazardous flank movements, or surprises, after days of hard scouting. In fact, he has had to be the eyes and ears of the army as well as the means for effecting remarkable tactical results by securing comparatively bloodless evacuations of entrenched positions. On the battle-field itself he has ordinarily fought on foot; he has had to skirmish against perhaps the best skirmishers in the world, and to beat the crafty farmer of the veldt at his own game. Of old he was generally held in hand to finish brilliantly what artillery and infantry had begun. In South Africa he has had to work alone and unheralded, on ground eminently unsuitable to the cavalry tactics of tradition, and against a foe whose lack of science was more than made up for by an almost unprecedented wariness, knowledge of the ground, and

mobility. And further, with no corresponding arm to meet and oppose him, he was deprived of those chances of action and stimulus that are vital to his purpose and being. Practically, therefore, the British cavalry, trained in the older school of tactics, have been compelled to remodel their whole system of fighting in the face of the enemy, and to adapt themselves to entirely novel and abnormal conditions of warfare, unrecognised by all the accepted canons of to-day.

Lord Roberts found in his cavalry the weapon which he needed to drive the Boers from the carefully prepared positions by which they hoped to bar our way to Pretoria. To assault these positions with infantry, however brave and however well led, would have been costly in the extreme; to turn them by the aid of infantry would have taken too much time. That the rapid movements of the cavalry, and the consequent capture of Cronje, impressed the imagination of the Boers may be inferred from the manner in which they subsequently evacuated (practically without resistance) elaborately entrenched positions at Poplar Grove, Rhenoster River, Boschrand, and elsewhere, at the mere threat conveyed by the wide turning movements pushed with so much prescience and audacity by General French.

It was these movements, which never failed to bring out the enemy, that gave our cavalry their chief value in the campaign. Both by our successes and our failures we were taught that in mobility lay our chief strength. We began to perceive that the mounted rifleman of the veldt, simple farmer though he might be, was in reality a formidable enemy, and that he could be met and defeated only by troops able to

move with equal rapidity, to fire with equal accuracy, knit together with the sternest discipline and handled with consummate judgment.

Such a body the British cavalry quickly became, despite its imperfections of training due to our failure to discern in peace the altered conditions of war; and in General French was found the commander who, leaving tradition on one side, understood the newer requirements, and evolved a method of fighting which, if not in the books, was at once effective and sufficient. In him, indeed, the experience, resolution, and military vision of Lord Roberts, qualities essential to the higher command, met their true complement, those of dash, insight, ingenuity, alertness, zeal, and, more than all, resolve and fearlessness of responsibility, combined with a comprehension of the enemy's nature and an instinct of his intentions. Throughout the operations entrusted to his charge General French was never at a loss. He had a perfect intuition for making the right move at the right moment; he walked into no trap; there never was a surrender of any concrete body of cavalry under his command; and even if his success might, on more than one occasion, have conceivably been more complete, his plans never miscarried in any particular in which their execution was practicable. What he did in defiance of theory was justified by accomplished results. Under his initiative and guidance the British cavalry, forsaking the old well-worn ruts for the untraversed road of an unprecedented warfare, proved that, while adapting its methods to new conditions, its mettle, its spirit, and its irresistibility remained unchanged and unimpaired.

It was after spending a considerable time (as one of the correspondents of *The Standard*) with the troops under General French's command that the idea of this narrative began to take shape. The immensity of the task continually presented to the cavalry, their ready and effective co-operation in every movement, the excellence of their reconnaissance-work, the labours and the self-sacrifices of their officers, the endurance, good-temper, and humanity of the men, the apparent misconception in the public mind as to what they had attempted and what they had achieved, and finally the demand for reform in this branch of the Service,—all these were strong incentives to the work. I make no claim to any special qualification for it; but I may perhaps plead that I have spared no pains to ensure accuracy, and to that end have sought the aid of men of every rank in the field. A number of authorities on military subjects have also been consulted, particularly those dealing with the mounted branch of the Service, such as the works of Prince Kraft, Bernhardi, and Pelet Narbonne, of Sir Evelyn Wood and Sir Frederick Maurice, studies which have reference to past experience and present changes, with their bearing on the future.

It need not be regarded as in the slightest degree detracting from the credit due to any other arm of the Service, if it be said that the mounted arm has contributed very largely to the success of our efforts against the Boers. This conclusion will, I trust, be deduced from the record of the cavalry operations which it is proposed to give in the following chapters.

Much inquiry and many opportunities for observation have tended to the conviction that, so far from

having become an obsolete and useless arm, the conditions of modern warfare are likely in the future to make even greater demands on the cavalry, and considerably to increase their sphere of usefulness. But our system needs perfecting; and we should see to it that efficiency is based on common-sense no less than on military science, and seek to turn to the best account the knowledge and experience which the war has given to soldiers of every rank.

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WITH GENERAL FRENCH AND THE CAVALRY IN SOUTH AFRICA

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

This perhaps may do some good, especially if the Boers, on their travels, see and learn what good government is worth to any community, and it will enable those proceeding to the Colony and to Natal to draw a comparison between a strong and civilised government and an abject, imbecile, and barbarous misrule. . . . . You will see by *The Argus* (No. 156) that our High Court has held a sitting, and also the result of the trials. *The case of Locket shows what justice the Uitlanders get.* In the same paper you will see a letter in Dutch, signed *Een Boer 39 mylen van Potchefstroom.* It is well worth a perusal. The writer would like to see another sort of freedom established than the one we have; and come eventually it must. No matter how much the British Government may wriggle and try to shirk the responsibility, if they don't come willingly, they will have to come in the end through the force of circumstances.—*From a Correspondent in the Transvaal to "The Friend." "Burghensdorp Gazette," May 29th,* 1869.

Intelligence, mobilisation, topographical, and what I may call strategical duties, *i.e.* the planning of campaigns and the preparation of theatres of war, have all to be discharged, and the neglect of any one of them, in any quarter whatsoever, may, as we discovered in South Africa, mean disaster, and even disgrace.—*Extract from an article on "Strategy and its Teaching," by Lieut.-Colonel G. F. Henderson. "Journal of the Royal United Service Institution," July,* 1898.

IN a work dealing with the South African war it is fitting that a few preliminary observations should be made upon the causes which led to the outbreak of hostilities. For many years previously the Boers had

come to regard British authority in South Africa as a thing of little substance, and incapable of offering effective resistance to encroachment. That authority had never been exercised in a dictatorial or aggressive manner, and the Boer politician, convinced that the influence of the Paramount Power was on the wane and might be treated with scant consideration, began eagerly to bend the situation to his own ambitions, to devise a political creed which, in establishing a party that should become a dominant factor in the future of the country, might unite the Boers by one common aim. The alienation of sympathy from the British, the revival of half-forgotten grievances, and the widening of present discontent,—elements conducive to Boer antipathy and prejudice, while they appeared to him a means of paving the way to the foundation of Boer pre-eminence—all tended to produce racial schism and its consequences. The magnanimity displayed in the peace of 1881, arising from a generous sympathy with a race less fortunate than our own, for whose protection, and even preservation, we had already made such heavy sacrifices in blood and money by the native wars waged against Sekukuni and the Zulus, led the ministers of the day and their public to expect that our forbearance would meet with a ready response and would secure to us the confidence and loyal co-operation of the Boers.

But our motives were misunderstood, if not wilfully misinterpreted. Our self-sacrifice at that juncture left the racial question, as between Briton and Boer in South Africa, unsettled, and bequeathed a legacy of conflicting ideals and aspirations. Boerdom in its wider, and Krugerism in its narrower sense were the outcome of the Majuba policy.

Purporting to be solely an organisation for raising

the agricultural and social status of the Boer, the Afrikander Bond came into being, and developed a political propaganda to teach the farmer his strength, and give the Afrikander supreme authority in South Africa. This new creed found its greatest apostle in Paul Kruger. The Conventions of 1881 and 1884 were but the stepping-stones to his ambition, since he had determined that the South African Republic, which had been reared in the spirit of independence and the untrammelled traditions of the Voor-trekkers (the original trekkers of 1838), should become a bulwark of Boerdom throughout the country. With indomitable will and judgment in his choice of men, by bluntness or by craft, he drove forward his policy, never for one moment losing sight of the goal. In strong contrast with this was the indifference and vacillation of the Paramount Power, which, though disturbed by the mistakes of the peace policy, was yet content to acquiesce in the situation and vainly hope that trouble was at an end. But that was not so; on the contrary, the uncertainty of our policy became the cause of many new difficulties, which at last made war inevitable.

The war of 1881 brought not only glory and independence to the Transvaal Boers, but also a return of that poverty which more than anything else had induced British occupation. The exchequer was empty, the burghers unable or unwilling to refill it; but in the nick of time came the discovery of the gold-fields; money poured in and the position was saved. Paul Kruger saw his chance, and was not slow to avail himself of it. For reasons which may be briefly explained, the Cape Colony and the Orange Free State watched the new development in the Transvaal with keen interest. Political ideas had taken root and

shape through the medium of the Afrikander Bond, and when the discovery of the diamond-mines at Kimberley and Jagersfontein began to attract enterprise to South Africa, the new comers, with their different manners and ideas, threatened the patriarchal customs and traditions of Afrikanderism, and under the personality of Cecil Rhodes began to make their presence felt. The Southern Boer welcomed the growing power of his kinsfolk as a bulwark against this influence. Their representatives in the Afrikander Bond, the most powerful organization South Africa has known, were ready to make any sacrifice to foster the growth of the new dominion beyond the Vaal.

Paul Kruger and his advisers were too shrewd to underestimate the perils which the promise of wealth and power carried in their train. The facilities, therefore, to be given to the new comers were to be restricted to only a few among them, who, while their enterprise should assist the State and their profits fill its coffers, could at the same time be easily controlled and accounted for. The danger of the influx of an adventurous population attaining affluence under the protection of liberal institutions was too serious to be lost sight of, and it became the object of Mr. Kruger's ingenuity to prevent such a development.

It was with the discovery of the Barberton and Witwatersrand gold-fields, which were regarded as at once a danger and a blessing, that his policy took definite shape. Mineral wealth was to be the ladder by which his people should attain success. The narrow-mindedness and rapacity, which many saw in his policy towards the gold-fields, were in reality but a move in the larger game. The mining industry was to be permitted to expand sufficiently to fill the Transvaal treasury, because money was needed for political

ends; but at the same time, by ingenious manipulation of the Government machinery and with the judicious imposition of administrative burdens, a too rapid growth of the gold-fields was to be stemmed. The rich mines alone were to be given a chance, and thus a firm hand would be kept upon the Uitlanders, lest their increase should render it impossible to control them. Under this system of partial encouragement, which gave a limited prosperity to a few representatives of capital, the mass of the population, with no secure footing of their own, felt themselves dependent and unconsidered. It was in consequence of this policy that, when subsequently the general body of the Uitlanders attempted to secure their rights by political agitation, most of the representatives of capital, having little to complain of so far as money was concerned, stood aloof and took no part in public affairs.

It might have been supposed that the circumstances in which the independence of the country was granted to the Transvaal by England would have led President Kruger to build up the new State on a basis of friendly co-operation with the Paramount Power, but his distrust of England, and all that was English, was too deep for that. Although he attributed the peace after Majuba to fear on the part of England, still he never ceased to anticipate a lurking danger from that source, and his mind never tired of devising means by which British influence could be counteracted, and the sympathy of those who either lived in the English colonies or in honest friendship with them could be alienated. Alarmed at the possibilities of power in the foreign population, instead of seeking to conciliate and befriend them, he became ever more pronounced in his hostile policy, and fomented the prejudices of his burghers by denouncing the Uitlanders in terms of bitter contempt.

Every foreigner whose antipathy to England could be relied on found a hearty welcome, which was denied to the subjects of the Paramount Power, and lending himself to the anti-British Policy of Dr. Leyds, who brought out many Hollander allies to strengthen the ranks of his adherents, he converted his capital into a camp of anti-British intrigue.

Mr. Kruger's aggression soon began to assume a more real and serious aspect. Keeping closely within the four corners of the Convention so far as its literal wording was concerned, the Government of the Transvaal found ways and means of circumventing its intentions till not a shred was left of the spirit in which it had been conceived. The existing franchise-laws, which granted new comers a voice in the councils of the country, were altered beyond recognition, till to all practical purposes it had become impossible for an Uitlander to take his place as a citizen of the State. Every opportunity of curtailing the freedom of those who had come into the country, knowing only the spirit and not the wording of the Convention, was promptly seized, and the Uitlander, and more particularly the English settler, became the object of plundering and scornful legislation. But though this policy was clearly and cleverly thought out, the rapid accumulation of wealth brought with it evils which even a State organised on a higher plane of civilisation and morality might have found it difficult to resist. With the anxiety to seize upon the chances of securing and disposing of interests as the opportunity of the moment offered, came an eagerness to overcome all hindrances, which many of the Transvaal officials were not slow to recognise; and as an almost inevitable consequence followed bribery and corruption which, like a cancer, soon found its way into every department of the new

administration. Things were rapidly going from bad to worse. Those who desired to make an honest living in their adopted country were confronted with a barrier of prejudice, aggression, and moral stagnation, and had recourse to protest and appeal, and finally to political agitation, as the most natural, and indeed the only possible, means of obtaining redress.

As the result of this discontent the National Union, representative of the best elements of the Uitlander population, came into being, assembling on its platform men of English as well as Dutch and South African parentage, who, clearly seeing the trend of existing conditions, persistently strove to persuade the authorities to depart from the error of their ways, and seek in justice and honest legislation the true basis of a Commonwealth. Hitherto the capitalists could be pronounced guiltless of any part in the political situation. The National Union found its overtures to Pretoria fruitless. No matter what line it pursued its representations were flouted and its efforts at conciliation and compromise met with nothing but contumely, while the Suzerain Power remained apparently indifferent to the appeals and petitions addressed to it through the High Commissioner at Cape Town. When at last the High Commissioner, Sir Henry Loch, did come to Pretoria, the Uitlanders hoped that their cause was to be taken up; but they hoped in vain. The mission was chiefly concerned with the affairs of Swazieland, and Mr. Kruger struck an excellent bargain for himself, while the Uitlanders' interests were ignored.

But the danger which was threatening Imperial interests in South Africa was not lost on the Cape Premier, Cecil Rhodes, whom Paul Kruger from the very first recognised as his most formidable enemy.

He watched the course of affairs at Pretoria, and perceiving the direction in which it was tending, determined to frustrate them. It was through his influence that the Boer invaders were pushed backward from Stella and Goschen Land where they intended to found a new Republic, and it was his foresight that refused Mr. Kruger an outlet to his ambitions in Matabeland and the North. He saw that English influence and interest in South Africa were being ruined by the want of a continuous and direct policy on the part of the authorities in Downing Street. Dispirited by the uselessness of her sacrifices in South Africa, England, weary of listening to these unending tales of discontent and trouble, preferred to believe that all was well, and to accept the smooth accounts of the fusion of the races and mutual goodwill. Instead of taking prompt action, her ministers contented themselves with speeches full of sounding platitudes and wearisome repetitions of their determination to uphold the paramountcy of Great Britain.

All this time Cecil Rhodes was devoting his whole attention to strengthening and extending Imperialism in South Africa, working steadily towards an end which, while it strove to satisfy the Boer and gain his loyalty, was opposed root and branch to the aims of the President of the Transvaal. His connection with the Afrikander Bond accounts for the hostility of Mr. Kruger towards the Cape Colony. He was unable to coerce the Bond into severing their allegiance with a factor that brought them so much material advantage, and knew well that Mr. Rhodes's influence in their councils was hostile to his designs, which otherwise might have found nothing but encouragement. And thus matters dragged on. There was no response from Pretoria, and no help

from England. The Uitlanders began to despair, and their impatience could no longer be repressed, when again the personality of Cecil Rhodes asserted itself, and making one supreme, though unlawful, effort to strike a blow at the mastery of Pretoria, he united Johannesburg in a common purpose, and the sequel was the disastrous episode of the Jameson Raid.

Then Paul Kruger began to redouble his preparations, and set himself steadily and unfalteringly for the conflict which he subsequently forced upon the Suzerain Power. Just as Bismarck decided upon and provided for war with Austria four years before the event, so the President of the Transvaal was putting himself in readiness for a trial of strength with England for years before he threw down the gauntlet. He had a clearly defined policy, and we had no policy at all. Our one anxiety was to preserve peace, and to abstain from anything like provocation. Rather than cause friction by insisting on a general settlement of the dangerous problems that were maturing on the Witwatersrand, Lord Rosmead seemed content to sacrifice, or afraid to assert, the Imperial authority. The Boers took advantage at every hand of our forbearance and inactivity, which they construed as weakness. The maxim *Si vis pacem, para bellum*, which Moltke used with so much force in support of his plea for increasing the Prussian army when the French were found to be erecting block-houses along the frontier, might have occurred to our ministers as applicable to the state of things in South Africa; but they were apparently paralysed by a morbid fear lest we should even be suspected of contemplating aggression. Thus in the matter of preparation the Boers had it all their own way. What was meant on our part to be tactful reserve and

restraint, the Boer Government turned to the best advantage for themselves, and, especially after the Jameson Raid, they sustained the rôle of the aggrieved party in support of the most unwarrantable claims to dictate our South African policy. Our apparent acquiescence encouraged their self-confidence to such a degree that even when we wanted troops to quell the last native rising in Rhodesia, the Boers demanded an explanation of the presence of British soldiers in that region, and professed distrust of the assurances they received.

The Jameson Raid left Paul Kruger master of the situation, and gave him an opportunity which he wantonly threw away. Any genuine move in the direction of concession and conciliation would have secured him universal support and applause. A generous policy towards the Uitlanders, inaugurated at a time when he had been admittedly both grievously wronged and entirely victorious, must have assured his position in his own country and in the eyes of the world, without question or controversy. The British Colonial Office exhorted him to introduce measures that were obviously necessary for the contentment of the Uitlander population. Representations and counsel met only with discourtesy. He certainly went so far as to preach a policy of "forgive and forget," but in practice became increasingly aggressive and repeatedly committed breaches of the Convention. Repressive measures of the most irritating nature were resorted to, which kindled feelings of revolt in men who, born and brought up in Africa, had lived under the freedom and liberty of the English Flag, and could not fail to be exasperated by a high-handed and tyrannous rule. Their words and actions were reported to Pretoria by an organised gang of local spies who followed them

everywhere; the Pass Law, the Press Law, the Aliens Expulsion Law were added to the Code of Statutes, measures against the freedom of public speech were rigorously enforced, and the Bench was made subservient to the Legislature. The London Convention, in fact, was almost entirely set aside, and no respect was paid to the remonstrances of the Imperial Government against its constant and open violation.

Recognising from the first that the true power of the Transvaal was to stand alone, Mr. Kruger had always sternly set his face against every combination of trade or Customs which might seem to hint at Federalism. Indeed, his mind was set either on a South Africa that should gradually become Boer from sea to sea, or, if that could not be, on forming a sovereign and independent State within his own borders, strong enough to run counter to British influence in South Africa, and at last so to dominate it that the power and prestige of Great Britain would have lost all reality.

Thus matters were tending to an irksome and dangerous pass, when Sir Alfred Milner succeeded Lord Rosmead in the High Commissionership. For a considerable time Sir Alfred refrained from committing himself to any public utterance that could be construed as foreshadowing a firmer exercise of British authority. His speech at Graaf Reinet, therefore, came as a surprise, when he declared that to impute disloyalty to any colonist would be monstrous. To us there seemed no special significance in the statement and little note was taken of it, but the Afrikander Bond and Pretoria, always alert and sensitive to the utterances of public men, read into his words his opinion of their policy and an indication of his own. The Uitlanders who were foiled and dispirited, feeling

that they had been badly treated, if not deserted, by the Home Government, again resumed, by petitions and otherwise, their old agitation. The shooting of Edgar, a British subject, by a Boer policeman added meaning to their wrongs, and they determined that the British Government should be under no misconception as to the nature and extent of their grievances.

Soon afterwards followed the Bloemfontein Conference. No one who had lived in the Transvaal since the early days of Johannesburg could have expected from it anything but failure. And what would be the issue? Convention or no Convention, Suzerainty or no Suzerainty, we were the Paramount Power in South Africa, and it was our right, as well as our duty, to intervene when our fellow-subjects complained of unjust and oppressive treatment. This view at last prevailed, and the British Government stood committed to the assertion, or to the final surrender of its authority. The Bloemfontein Conference showed that the British attitude of indifference was to be abandoned, and the Imperial authority at last definitely exercised. Having taken its stand, it was reasonable to suppose that Great Britain would be prepared for the possibility of failure in the negotiations, and for strong action in the event of uncivil usage or affront. Had the British Government taken note of the millions spent annually by the Transvaal on arms and measures of defence, which constituted an open menace to the peace of the country? Did we possess the military superiority adequate to uphold the authority we claimed as the Paramount Power in South Africa?

Naturally the colonists assumed that these questions could be answered only in the affirmative, for surely the experience of the past ought to have warned us

of the folly of drifting carelessly into difficulties that might diminish rather than add to our military reputation, and aggravate rather than alleviate the condition of the country. They naturally supposed that we had taken a leaf from the book of our great Continental neighbours, and had so improved and developed our military system as to bring it up to the highest standard of efficiency. The extent of the Boer armaments indicated seriously enough that we should have to encounter a formidable foe, yet the colonists believed all that they had been told of our wonderful artillery, reported to be the most perfect in the world. One section of them, disbelieving in the possibility of actual war, imagined that a British military demonstration would induce the Boers to grant better terms than they were then disposed to concede to diplomacy, while a larger section were confident that, if negotiations failed and a temporary rupture followed, Pretoria would not risk the loss of its present independence, but would yield under military pressure any measures of reform that might be demanded.

All parties were wrong. We now know that, far from dreading our reputed military superiority, the Boers, being too well informed from abroad as to our imagined readiness for war, entertained a contempt for our army, and doubted not that, in a trial of strength, success would once more rest with them. Inflated with such ideas they took the initiative in opening hostilities, and it must be admitted that if they had been as skilful and stubborn in attack as they were in defence, and had boldly taken advantage of their opportunities in the early stages of the conflict, our task would have been increased beyond calculation. If war was seriously contemplated our Government

was guilty of reckless optimism in treating lightly the fighting efficiency of the Boers, in supposing that they would be terrified into submission by a mere show of force, and in expecting that the issue would easily be decided in our favour. Such optimism was inexcusable in the face of facts then within the cognisance of our Government, and which have since become notorious. Our unreadiness can be explained only on the assumption that the British Government did not seriously anticipate war. No Power deliberately contemplating war could have been so totally lacking in foresight as to neglect even the elementary and initial precaution of obtaining surveys of the enemy's country and a thorough knowledge of its own territory. Although any military expert could have perceived, by a cursory glance at the map, which were the localities that would have to be safeguarded against invasion, we had no survey even of the Tugela, nor even an accurate map of the Colesberg neighbourhood. In the operations conducted there we had to depend upon information gathered on the way, a state of things which, of course, seriously hampered the officer in command. The only available maps were incomplete and inaccurate, and even had they been perfect, the supply was so insufficient that the task of subordinate commanding officers and of those in charge of the transport was rendered extremely difficult. Of coal no provision whatever was made at Durban or Maritzburg, although it must have been obvious that the Dundee coal-fields on the important Natal railway might easily be cut off, as they actually were. Evidently the British Government trusted to securing all they wanted by diplomacy, and left the idea of war out of their calculations, notwithstanding their subsequent declaration that it was inevitable.

But whatever may be said as to the cause and origin of hostilities, the Boers by their strong hold on the country and by their fighting power, and we by our unreadiness and ineptitude, have done much to show that the ambition, which they cherished and we have ridiculed, was not so insensate as at first appeared. If such an ambition could be justified, the Boers have done their best to justify it. The danger to our authority in South Africa which has been revealed since the war began, would have been more formidable if we had been involved in complications in any other part of the world, proving unmistakably the soundness of Sir Alfred Milner's Imperial policy, and the rare instinct by which he was guided. Unfortunately the Government at home failed to display corresponding statesmanship. Sir Alfred in his despatches, and the Boers in arming as they did, had made manifest that the issue could only mean war. This was clear enough to have justified us, no matter what extraneous considerations existed, in neutralising, by a determined concurrent military policy, any action on the part of the Transvaal that indicated an attempt to subvert our supremacy in South Africa, or that tended in that direction. In this way it can hardly be doubted that war might have been averted, or that, if it did come, it would have been short and certain of effecting our objects, and would not have given the Boers the opportunities they afterwards had of developing such qualities of courage and self-reliance as, judging by their performances at Mafeking, Kimberley, Ladysmith, and Colesberg, they did not at the outset possess, and which, while adding considerably to the difficulties of our task, have diminished our reputation while increasing the credit of our enemy.

In embarking on the enterprise which has led to

such dismal results for themselves, the Boers set at defiance the advice of their own best friends. The Chief Justice of Cape Colony, Sir Henry de Villiers, who went so far on one occasion as to induce the judges at Pretoria to submit to the illegalities of President Kruger, implored the Transvaal Government to hold its hand and consider the necessity of reform, warning them of the alternative of disaster that must ensue. Mr. Hofmeyer himself, the high priest of the Bond mysteries, whether he feared that the President was overshooting his mark and was forcing on hostilities in which the cause of the Bond might suffer, certainly exerted all his influence to impress upon the Boers that their methods were wrong and that they must change them if they would avert a catastrophe. The historian will not fail to take into account this evidence as establishing the justice of our cause; nor will he fail to note the rift that was surely widening between the orthodox Krugerites and the more progressive Boers. This was a difference that tended against the power of the President, and so seriously threatened his dictatorship, that, when put to the test of votes, the voice of the people declared itself as much in favour of the more enlightened Joubert as of Oom Paul. The attitude of the Volksraad and the temper of his people were changed, and Kruger with his usual perception discerned that he was no longer sole arbiter of events. But with the Jameson Raid his old influence and control returned in great measure. Triumphantly he flaunted the "perfidy of England" in the face of his burghers, made it the danger-cry of their independence to rally them once more to his standard, and in a last supreme effort to regain his hold upon them, and so to save his policy and his country, he strained the

situation beyond what it would bear and forced on the final catastrophe.

While Mr. Steyn was engaged in telegraphic communication with Sir Alfred Milner, for the purpose of throwing us off our guard and inducing us to cease our military preparations, Paul Kruger was calling out his forces, who were really mobilising a month before he launched his ultimatum. So far from the war being due to our aggressiveness or interference, it would be nearer the truth to say that it was brought about by our patience and forbearance, which encouraged the designs of the Boers by causing them to mistake the meaning of our attitude.

When war did come, it became apparent that the chief defect on our side was lack of mobility, a quality which the Boers possessed in a striking degree, and which gave them their superior advantage at an early stage and greatly increased our difficulties, as the following pages will show. In nothing was adequate preparation more necessary than in the provision of a sufficiency of horses and a complete equipment for mounted troops. Our deficiencies in this respect were doubtless attributable to our having, in our overconfidence, neglected to consider all that would be involved in a war with such an enemy, and failed to take the preparatory measures that should have been taken before we allowed negotiations to be succeeded by hostilities.

It is not necessary for the purpose of this book to refer at length to the opening stages of the South African campaign; but it is desirable that the reader should have a clear conception of the position of affairs at the time when General French began the operations which checkmated the efforts of the Boer army to invade British territory.

The loyal inhabitants of Cape Colony and Natal were under no illusions as to the intentions of their neighbours. The people of Natal in particular took early steps to impress their views upon the Home Government, for they had learned by bitter experience that until their boundaries were readjusted, they must always lie open to an enemy. They were assured in return that the colony would be protected "by all the forces of the British Empire," and in earnest of this pledge a few troops were hastily collected from Egypt, from India, and from the Mediterranean garrisons; yet these slender measures were so delayed that the troops did not reach the headquarters of Sir George White till within a few days of the actual outbreak of hostilities.

The ultimatum of the allied Republics was received in this country on October 11th, 1899. At that moment Sir George White, who had hastened from Gibraltar to assume command of the Natal Field Force, had under his orders four cavalry regiments, 11 battalions of infantry, and six batteries of field-artillery with a mountain-battery and about 2000 irregular horse raised in the colony. Of these there were at Dundee under General Penn-Symons one regiment of cavalry, three batteries of artillery, four battalions of infantry, and about 200 Natal Police; the rest were at Ladysmith with Sir George White.

In Cape Colony the long frontier between British territory and the hostile States was watched rather than guarded by a handful of regular troops and a few local levies. At Kimberley lay half a battalion of infantry. The safety of De Aar, an important junction where military stores of considerable value had been accumulated, was entrusted to the charge of four companies of infantry and a party of

mounted men. At Mafeking Colonel Baden-Powell had a handful of police and a few hundred volunteers. None of these places was provided with modern artillery, though guns had been urgently demanded some time before war broke out.

In short, the force in Natal was barely sufficient for defensive purposes, even if concentrated in the most favourable situation, and Cape Colony lay absolutely at the mercy of the enemy. There was nothing to prevent the Boers from masking General White with a comparatively small portion of their forces and sweeping down on Cape Town itself before a single soldier could be landed from England. We have many things to be thankful for in the conduct of this campaign, but for none more than the incredible apathy with which the Boers let slip their chances of almost certain success till the hour of peril had passed and our transports were disgorging thousands of British troops upon the quays of Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, and Durban.

Before the first transport had taken up her moorings we had received proof that the war was to be something very different from a triumphal military procession to Pretoria. From the first the British forces in Natal invited destruction by the dangerous and exposed position in which they had been placed. Sir George White, with profound military judgment, realised the seriousness of the situation, and reorganising the faulty disposition of his troops urged that no military consideration could justify the occupation of Dundee by Sir William Penn-Symons and his small force, inasmuch as they were there thrust forward into the very jaws of the Boer position, while their sole means of communication with Ladysmith was a railway which lay within easy striking distance of the enemy's frontier

throughout its length. The safety of General Symons was even more seriously compromised by the fact that his camp could be assailed from three directions at once, and practically without warning; for the Boers, advancing simultaneously from Newcastle, from Vryheid across the Buffalo, and from the Free State through the passes of the Drakensberg, could strike the British force within a day after quitting their own territory.

The situation of the camp at Dundee was also tactically unsound. Commanded on one side by the Impati and on the other by Talana Hill, its position must have caused uneasiness to the least experienced soldier. It is true that General Symons, brave and sanguine to a fault, and keen to close with an enemy whose fighting powers he dangerously underestimated, was confident that he could maintain his ground against any force likely to attack him. The decisive factor in retaining him in this dangerous place, however, was the plea of the Governor of Natal, Sir Walter Hely Hutchinson, that political considerations forbade withdrawal. Sir George White remonstrated, but was eventually compelled to acquiesce. As we go on we shall see that this was not the last occasion on which political considerations had a baneful effect upon the actions of our military commanders.

Sir George White's own position was hardly less critical. He was compelled to occupy Ladysmith, a great depôt of military stores, situated at the junction of the railways leading from Natal to Harrismith and Pretoria respectively, and consequently of considerable strategic importance. Political considerations, and, in a sense, military exigencies, forbade his withdrawal across the Tugela, the former because such a movement would have had even a worse moral effect

than the withdrawal of General Symons from Dundee, the latter because he was not in a position to remove the stores on which the British troops relied. Though Ladysmith was eminently undefensible (lying on a plain enclosed on three sides by the Klip River, and dominated on every hand by spurs of the Drakensberg), Sir George considered that he had no alternative but to remain there, hoping to extricate General Symons without serious loss, and possibly to beat the Boers in detail as they emerged from the Drakensberg passes, which were watched night and day by British patrols.

The blow did not fall at once. The time fixed by the Boer ultimatum expired without any forward movement on the part of the enemy. From the far western border of the Transvaal came news that a hostile commando had intercepted an armoured train and captured some small and obsolete guns which were being carried to Mafeking. From Kimberley we heard that the enemy were massing on the frontier with a view to the investment of the town. But from the Natal borders there was no news save rumours of the assembling of large forces of Boers, some of whom crossed the frontier on October 12th and occupied Charlestown. As a matter of fact, while fully conscious of the importance of striking without loss of time, the Boers found themselves hampered in their movements by the difficulty of bringing up supplies to the commandos at the front in consequence of the congested state of their railways and the want of proper organisation in their supply and transport service.

At last, by October 12th, they believed themselves ready to advance and began a movement in three columns on the Biggarsberg-Dundee line. To quote from Sir George White's despatches :—

The main column, under General Joubert, occupied Newcastle, and marched south by the road leading thence on Glencoe Junction. A second column, under Viljoen, crossed Botha's Pass, and moved south over the Biggarsberg, cutting the railway from Glencoe Junction to Ladysmith on the 19th October at Elandslaagte, where they took up a position. A third column, under Lucas Meyer, crossed the Buffalo River, marching west on Dundee, and arrived within striking distance of that place on the night of the 19th October. Meanwhile the Free State forces west of Ladysmith contented themselves with occupying the country at the foot of the Drakensberg Range, without entering the near neighbourhood of Ladysmith, and, though the mounted patrols of both sides were constantly in touch, up to the evening of the 19th October nothing of importance took place.

Clearly, therefore, the enemy were working upon a concerted plan, framed to neutralise the force under Sir George White and at the same time to cut off and destroy General Symons. The threat conveyed by the Free State forces debouching leisurely from the passes of the Drakensberg, and carefully refraining from aggressive action, held Sir George White in Ladysmith, which would be at once exposed to attack if any attempt was made by the British to move to General Symons's assistance. Meanwhile the three columns converged on Dundee, the one under Viljoen placing itself astride of the railway between Symons and White, the others under Joubert timing their march so as to arrive simultaneously before the former's camp.

The march of the straggling column, which Joubert had despatched under Erasmus, was delayed by mist, with the result that when Lucas Meyer's command crowned Talana Hill on the morning of October 20th, Joubert's columns were still entangled in the gorges of the Biggarsberg, and the first comer had to bear unsupported the brunt of the attack which was promptly delivered by the over-confident Symons. Admirably handled, and fighting with great dash and determination, Symons's little force succeeded in

driving the Boers from the precipitous mountain on which they had hoped to await Joubert's arrival in security. Early in the action General Symons fell mortally wounded, but the loss of their commander did not shake the resolution of his troops. As our infantry crowned the hill from which they had ousted the enemy, the British guns, which had galloped forward during the last stage of the attack, were offered a magnificent target by the flying Boers, who, within short range, were running to their ponies and streaming away to the eastward. At this moment, just as the guns were about to open a fire which must have proved annihilating, a white flag was seen by our men. This was interpreted as a token of surrender, and the British artillery-commander held his hand. Before the mistake could be rectified the opportunity had passed, thus saving the enemy from a disaster which might have changed the whole course of the campaign. Nor was this the only unfortunate incident of the battle, for two squadrons of the 18th Hussars and some mounted infantry, straying in the mist, marched into the arms of Erasmus, and were captured and sent to Pretoria where they were regarded as a tangible proof of the prowess of our enemy.

Meanwhile Sir George White had not been idle. On October 20th he ascertained that Viljoen had seized the railway-station at Elandslaagte, and on the following day he despatched General French to drive him away and repair the railway. The troops at the General's disposal proving insufficient, as the Boers were in possession of powerful artillery and were posted on a commanding group of hills about one mile south-east of the railway-station, he applied to Ladysmith for reinforcements, and on their arrival at

about three o'clock in the afternoon, proceeded at once to carry out his instructions. The plan of attack was to hold the Boers in front and to make the main attack upon their left; but as the action developed it soon became apparent that, from the nature of the ground, the flank attack was in reality a frontal attack, and a frontal attack over difficult ground against an admirably posted enemy. In the thick of a thunder-storm, the Imperial Light Horse, the Gordons, and the Manchesters closed with the enemy and drove him from his position. As the first fury of the charge spent itself, the Boers attempted to recover the day by a counter-attack, which, however, was only momentary. Most of them had already fled; the remnant were soon disposed of, and the British cavalry charged again and again in the gathering darkness through the panic-stricken fugitives. The victory was ours, but it proved costly. We had lost about 250 officers and men killed and wounded, and on the following day had to return to Ladysmith, leaving the railway at the mercy of the enemy.

General Yule, who succeeded to the command at Dundee after General Symons had been wounded, realised the danger of his situation, and the necessity of falling back. Admirably led by Colonel Dartnell of the Natal Police, he left Dundee on the evening of October 25th. The direct route would certainly be under the enemy's surveillance, and the circuitous Helpmakaar road was therefore preferred. Even so the force would probably have been cut off but for Sir George White's orders to branch off and retire on him, while he himself moved out from Ladysmith on October 24th, and by a strong demonstration held to their ground at Rietfontein a considerable body of Boers who were moving south to intercept Yule.

With the concentration of the Natal Field Force in Ladysmith the first stage of the war may be said to have ended. We had fought three engagements with complete tactical success, but so faulty had been our strategical position in the first instance, that our successes failed to diminish the difficulties of our situation.

His force at length concentrated at Ladysmith, Sir George White's first intention was to assume the offensive with the object of clearing his front and defeating the Boers in detail before the Free State and Transvaal forces could effect a junction. It was with this idea that he fought the action of Lombard's Kop on October 30th, which, had it succeeded, must have proved a serious check to any further combination on the part of the Boers. Attacking in a north-easterly direction with the bulk of his force, he endeavoured to secure his left by despatching overnight a small force of two battalions and a mountain-battery to seize some commanding ground in the neighbourhood of Nicholson's Nek. But the detachment had its mule-battery stampeded in the night, was surrounded in an untenable position soon after daybreak, and, after holding out till past two o'clock in the afternoon, laid down its arms. Nor was the main body under Sir George White more fortunate. At first the Boers fell back as our troops advanced, but gradually they began a steady pressure upon our right, and, by their continual efforts to envelope our extended line, made retirement imperative. As our troops withdrew towards Ladysmith, the enemy pressed them more severely, and the consequences might have been serious had it not been for the gallant and skilful manner in which the field-guns were handled. During the thick of the fight the naval

guns arrived at Ladysmith, and were of material assistance in silencing the Boers' fire and in covering the withdrawal of Sir George White's force. This action practically decided for the time being the fate of Ladysmith. An attempt was made to keep open communications with Natal by sending half a battalion of infantry to hold Colenso, but they were soon compelled to withdraw to the south, Colenso fell into the hands of the Boers, and the investment of the Natal Field Force was complete.

On the night of November 1st General French, who had been appointed to the command of the cavalry division in General Buller's army, succeeded in inducing the station-master at Ladysmith to send him down the line to Maritzburg in the last train which the Boers allowed to go through. The enemy fired on the train and for a few moments it appeared to be very doubtful whether it would get through, but the driver stood pluckily to his post, and General French was free to take up the duties and responsibilities which were at once placed upon his shoulders.

And now a word as to the strategical situation. Strategy has no unchanging rules, but its study enables the commander to appreciate the effect which the training, armament, and organisation of his enemy, the nature of the country in which he is about to fight, and of the communications on which he will have to rely for the moving and the supply of his own troops, must necessarily have upon the whole course of his operations. No plan of campaign can be regarded as strategically sound which is not based upon a careful study of these factors.

In June, 1899, some months before the outbreak of

the war, the British Intelligence Department laid before the military authorities a detailed statement of the strength and organisation of the enemy. We were warned that they would be able to put some 55,000 men into the field; that their troops, consisting almost entirely of mounted infantry, would be exceedingly mobile; that the men were hardy, expert with their weapons, and intimately acquainted with the country; that the railways on which we should be compelled in a great measure to rely for the transport of our supplies were peculiarly liable to interruption; and that a considerable proportion of the inhabitants of our own colonies were more or less in sympathy with the Boers. We were warned further that the enemy were well supplied with modern rifles and ammunition, that they possessed guns of the modern type, both light and heavy, manned by men trained under German instructors, and that great depôts of supplies, which would only be required in case of war, had been accumulated at strategic centres. On the other hand it was not anticipated that the burghers would be able to move their heaviest weapons in the field in the manner in which they afterwards did, and we prepared our expeditionary force on the assumption that our troops would not come under the fire of the enemy's big guns till a comparatively late stage of the campaign.

It is a military axiom that one's forces should be divided for the purpose of marching, to facilitate supply and transport, bearing in mind always that it is essential to unite the divisions so soon as there is a prospect of coming into collision with the enemy. Hence it would be an ideal arrangement to base the main subdivisions of an army on different points, and to provide them with converging lines of rail

which would enable them to effect a junction in close proximity to the hostile frontier. A glance at the map of South Africa will show that such an arrangement was possible in the case before us if we availed ourselves of Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, and East London, as points of disembarkation and bases for the three divisions of the army-corps. The divisions, disembarked at these three ports, would be able to use the three lines of rail joining (at De Aar, Naauwpoort, and Stormberg respectively) the railway which runs roughly parallel to the Orange River, the southern boundary of the Free State. It would thus be possible to provide separate bases and distinct lines of communication for each division, and at the same time avoid the dangerous plan of trusting to effect a junction on the field of battle. The three divisions could be assembled at three different points within striking distance of the enemy's frontier, thus weakening the defence by dispersion, and keeping in our own hands the line of railway connecting the three junctions aforesaid, while retaining the power of rapidly concentrating our forces either upon the centre or to a flank. No soldier could overlook for a moment the very obvious advantages to be gained by adopting such a plan of campaign, especially as all the railway lines available were single and narrow gauge, and could not be depended upon to carry, singly, the whole of the supplies which the united army would need.

The ports were quite equal to the demands which would be made upon them by the adoption of this scheme. It is true that both Port Elizabeth and East London were at a disadvantage as compared with Cape Town, for each of them had to be entered across a bar, thus limiting the time of entry for vessels of deep

draught; and it is also true that the quay accommodation at both places was very limited, and that the work of disembarking troops and stores would have to be carried out by the employment of lighters. But the advantages of obtaining three bases of supply far outweighed these drawbacks, and the military authorities at home therefore decided to disembark the three divisions of the army-corps at these three ports, and to concentrate upon the De Aar—Stormberg line, their subsequent action to be determined by events, with a strong preference for the central line of advance along the railway to Bloemfontein, and thence to Johannesburg and Pretoria. This plan must have pre-supposed that Sir George White with his 11,000 troops, more or less, would be able to ensure the safety of Natal. The military authorities apparently expected that on landing at Cape Town Sir Redvers Buller would find the bulk of the Boer forces occupied in a fruitless endeavour to force their way into Natal in the face of Sir George White's army, while the remainder of the burghers engaged in a desultory warfare with the small parties of regular and irregular troops to whom had been entrusted the duty of watching the northern frontier of Cape Colony. But the actual state of affairs was very different. Sir George White lay shut up in Ladysmith, and the enemy daily threatened to march on Pietermaritzburg and thence to Durban. In Cape Colony itself Kimberley was besieged and helpless. Bodies of the enemy had been observed along the line of the Orange River, and it was evident that they intended to move on Naauwpoort and Stormberg.

The situation was unforeseen and met us unprepared; and it was further complicated by the fact that a considerable proportion of the inhabitants of Cape Colony were more or less disloyal, and that an

important Boer success, such as the capture of Kimberley or Ladysmith, might encourage large numbers of the colonists openly to espouse the cause of the enemy, thus adding enormously to our difficulties.

With a view to holding the enemy everywhere Buller dispersed his forces. Although impressed with the enormous advantages which the Boers must gain from the difficult country lying between Ladysmith and the Tugela, he resolved to attempt the succour of Sir George White, to relieve Kimberley, and to check if possible any attempt on the part of the Boers to descend, by way of Naauwpoort or Stormberg, into Cape Colony. Accordingly he diverted the bulk of his army to Natal, and spent many months in an endeavour to penetrate the mountain barrier lying between himself and the beleagured British force. He entrusted the relief of Kimberley to Lord Methuen, sent General French with a small force, chiefly of cavalry, to Naauwpoort, there to confront and check the enemy in their attempt to enter the colony, and despatched General Gatacre to Molteno with a mere handful of troops, half of whom we were to lose in the attempt to surprise the un-reconnoitred position of the Boers at Stormberg.

A glance at the map, more especially at the map showing South Africa from the enemy's point of view, will indicate the advantages which such a division of the British forces at once gave to the Boers. It enabled them to operate on what are known strategically as interior lines, while we elected to attack on exterior lines, and on lines, moreover, separated by distances requiring many days to traverse. It was impossible for us to unite our forces, or even to communicate quickly between the several units composing them. The Boers on the

other hand had it in their power to concentrate rapidly on any threatened point. Indeed, to all intents and purposes, the plan of action adopted by Sir Redvers Buller had the effect of doubling the fighting power of the enemy; commandos which were one day fighting before Ladysmith, were engaged a few days later in attacking Kimberley, and *vice versa*. Moreover, by transferring the bulk of his army to Natal, General Buller surrendered the initiative to the enemy and elected to fight on the battle-field the Boers had chosen as eminently suited to their arms and tactics. A further disadvantage, incurred by General Buller's decision to shift his base, arose from the fact that the supply and transport officers, who had gone on ahead to prepare for the coming of the army, had to alter their arrangements at the last moment, and to move vast quantities of stores which had been accumulated in preparation for the advance on the Free State. This sudden alteration, news of which was received with considerable uneasiness at home, led to delays which enabled the enemy to perfect his arrangements for meeting our attack, and to forecast with exactness the time and place at which it would be delivered.

There is nothing perhaps more remarkable in the early stages of the campaign than the neglect on our part of any attempt to deceive the enemy as to our intentions. That Lord Methuen proposed to advance upon a certain date towards Kimberley by way of Belmont was known to the readers of every London paper for some days before he started; and General Buller himself made not the slightest attempt to conceal from the Boers his intention to force the passage of the Tugela at Colenso. It is hardly surprising that such a course of action should

have been attended with unfortunate results. Certainly we won at Belmont, but it is possible that we might not have had to fight there at all had Lord Methuen concealed his intentions, or had he allowed it to be believed that he proposed to march on Faure-smith,—a movement which, equally with a direct advance, might have had the effect of achieving his object, the relief of Kimberley.

Had the defence of Naauwpoort been entrusted to less capable hands than those of General French, who with a mere handful of troops succeeded, not only in checking the Boer advance but in driving them back on Colesberg, it is not unreasonable to suppose that the enemy would have been able to push on south and west to Cradock and the Hex River range, and thus bring about a state of affairs which might have shaken British rule in South Africa to its foundations.

CHAPTER II

COLESBERG

WHEN General French escaped from Ladysmith, as already described, he at once hastened to Cape Town to take over the command of the cavalry division for which he had been originally selected, and to confer with Sir Redvers Buller, who had by this time arrived in the colony.

He found the Commander-in-Chief's view to be that the claims of Natal and the relief of Sir George White were the supremely urgent considerations, and that there was no other way of extricating Ladysmith from peril except by a direct attack upon the besiegers. This would obviously require a force so considerable as to leave but few troops for service elsewhere, and there were many other points at which the need was pressing. Kimberley was clamouring for help: Cape Colony was in imminent danger of being overrun by commandos already concentrating at Norval's Pont and Colesberg; and every hour was aggravating the outlook. Not only the north but the east of Cape Colony as well had to be safeguarded by occupying strong strategic positions on the line to East London.

Lord Methuen with his division, unfortunately weak in mounted troops and deficient in transport, was sent to attempt the relief of Kimberley; General Gatacre,

with a numerically inferior force, proceeded towards Stormberg to guard the Eastern Districts; while to General French was assigned the arduous task of driving back the Boers from the neighbourhood of Naauwpoort, where they had appeared after our troops had withdrawn to concentrate at De Aar, which Sir Redvers Buller had fixed upon as his advanced base.

The importance of Naauwpoort lay in its being the junction of the Port Elizabeth, East London, and Cape Town railways and bifurcating with the Orange River and Transvaal systems; and yet it was strategically most vulnerable and actually at the mercy of the Boers. With Naauwpoort secure in their hands the position both of General Gatacre and Lord Methuen would be imperilled. The advance to Kimberley would have to be arrested, and the mobile Boer might make the defence of Cape Town our first concern. Slow to recognise their opportunities the enemy was still in the midst of their plans and preparations, when French was hastily approaching. He had left Cape Town not a day too early, for even while on his way north he heard that a bridge had been blown up on a part of the line between him and Naauwpoort.

On reaching De Aar he met General Wauchope, whom he urged to spare him some troops, mounted if possible, to strengthen the slender force that had preceded him to Naauwpoort. The most that could be spared were two companies of miscellaneous details drawn from detachments of mounted infantry.

Here also he learnt that a force of Boers were at this time threatening Philipstown from Colesberg, being thus within twenty miles of the main line to the north. He realised the precarious position in which Lord Methuen would be placed by the Boers cutting his communications at this point, and deciding

that the railway could be more effectively protected by attacking the enemy at Colesberg than by a thin defensive line along the track, he made the hemming in of the enemy near Colesberg his first objective, with Naauwpoort as his base. The advantage presented by Naauwpoort for this important purpose consisted in its being in direct and close railway connection with Colesberg and lying in the centre of country more open and less obstructed by wire fencing than the districts either to the east or to the west, and therefore more suitable for the operations of cavalry. Moreover it was already occupied by us, Major McCracken with a half battalion each of the Royal Berkshires and the Black Watch having most opportunely arrived there. A small force of Boers had actually been near the town, but retired the day before our troops made their appearance.

Orders were at once issued to accumulate at Naauwpoort 30 days' supplies for 3,000 men, 600 horses, and 500 mules.

At first sight the wide plains commanded by isolated kopjes appear admirably adapted for cavalry work, but closer examination and actual experience, especially where the narrower operations were confined, revealed a complexity of difficulties. There is no position less inviting to attack than one which affords the opponent many mutually supporting lines of defence. Such was the terrain round Colesberg. Down by the railway from Colesberg to Rensburg and Arundel spurs of the kopjes frequently abut upon a line of ridges, easily enabling the enemy, when dislodged from one position, to fall back, under cover, upon another having a command of fire over that evacuated.

To fully appreciate the intricate nature of the operations round Colesberg, between November 6th and

February 7th, it would be necessary to study the topography of the country closely, and to examine minutely the military conditions. The object of this narrative, however, is not to follow too microscopically the chain and sequence of events, lest the mind of the reader shall become confused and overweighted by the multiplicity of reconnaissances, attacks, and the relative multifarious details. The intention is to enable a clear general impression to be formed of the operations as a whole.

On November 21st the garrison at Naauwpoort numbered 945 men, with two nine-pound muzzle-loading guns, under the command of Major McCracken of the Berkshire regiment: the force included half a battalion of the Berkshires with two Maxims, half a battalion of the Black Watch with one Maxim, a detachment of the New South Wales Lancers, to which was joined a small party of the 5th Lancers (75 men and horses in all) and 25 Cape Police. The strategic importance of this post made it necessary to place it in an effective state of defence. The pumping-stations and sources of water-supply were fortified, and the whole area covering the junction and the camps protected by a cordon of lunettes, redoubts, breast-works, entrenchments, and look-out posts. Six Cossack posts were thrown out at points overlooking the approaches of the three railway-systems and main roads, and daily patrols sent out a distance of five miles beyond the Cossack posts north and north-east. Detailed orders were issued for manning the defences and alarm posts, and for garrison duties in the event of attack. Having completed the defences, General French, on his arrival at Naauwpoort on November 20th, proceeded on a series of reconnaissances with a view to the earliest possible attack on the Colesberg

position, which he believed to be essential to arrest any attempt of the Boers to gain a footing in the rear of Lord Methuen upon the Rosmead and De Aar line. On the evening of November 20th orders were issued for a reconnaissance with mounted troops and police, to locate the Boer positions and estimate the minimum strength for a flying column to attack Colesberg.

A party of 25 officers, non-commissioned officers, and men of the New South Wales Lancers with five police under Captain Cox were ordered to march out at three o'clock on the morning of November 21st with rations and feed for one day to reconnoitre the country for a distance of about 12 miles towards Colesberg, so as to prevent a train, timed to start two hours later, from being surprised by the enemy. A second detachment of 25 men of the New South Wales Lancers and five police with one day's rations and feed, and 30 men of the Berkshires were ordered to accompany this train.

The train with General French, his Chief Staff-Officer, and Intelligence Officer left Naauwpoort at a quarter to six. Two hours later word was sent in that the line was destroyed at a point one mile north of Tweedale Station, 10 miles from Naauwpoort. The train advanced and halted at the broken culvert where men and horses were detrained. The Berkshires occupied a hill to the north to guard the train, and Captain Cox's detachment of Lancers were disposed as outposts to cover it and give timely warning of the approach of a hostile force; in the event of the enemy advancing in strength the Berkshires were ordered to take the train back to Naauwpoort, covered by Captain Cox's detachment.

Meanwhile the other detachment of New South Wales Lancers under Lieutenant West (5th Lancers)

marched northwards reconnoitring on both sides of the railway, accompanied by General French and his Staff.

At noon, Arundel Station having been reached and found unoccupied, Lieutenant West and a patrol of three men were sent five miles further on to a point about nine miles from Colesberg. They could find no trace of the enemy, although a native pointed out a hill at the foot of which a Boer laager was reported to be situated. General French subsequently returned with West's detachment, and the force with him went back to Naauwpoort by rail, Captain Cox and the New South Wales Lancers covering the line.

As the result of the reconnaissance, General French, who had been reinforced by the arrival of two and a half companies of mounted infantry from De Aar, decided that he would next morning occupy a position north of Arundel station. From this point he intended attacking, so soon as his force was further augmented by two and a half battalions of infantry and two squadrons of cavalry for which he had asked.

Orders were issued for a patrol of eight mounted men, and two police with local knowledge, to proceed at three o'clock on the morning of November 22nd to reconnoitre the railway as far as the broken culvert on the line, and there to cover the advance of the construction train timed to depart at a quarter to five. Two companies of infantry, 10 police, and 25 of the New South Wales Lancers were told off to accompany and protect the train and its working-party. The officer in command had instructions to stop work in the event of attack, to entrain the gang and infantry, and return by rail, covered by a detachment of cavalry. In the afternoon two companies of mounted infantry were to follow by train and take

up a strong position north of Arundel, the cavalry at the culvert, after having covered their advance, proceeding along with them, while the rest of the Lancers were detailed to guard the returning trains. The culverts were reported mended by eleven o'clock, but nothing was seen of the enemy.

It was decided on second thoughts not to send the two companies. These dispositions have, however, been described to illustrate the methods which on repeated occasions, in endless reconnaissances, were adopted to cover detachments, prevent surprises, and beat off attacks.

At half-past four in the morning of November 23rd General French, with a detachment of mounted men and infantry, made a reconnaissance by train towards Arundel, the object being to gain a point within easy distance of Colesberg, whence three officer's patrols could be sent out to locate the enemy's positions. The hills immediately north of Arundel, which the General had always intended to hold on the arrival of reinforcements, and which his earlier reconnaissances had declared unoccupied, were now found to be in possession of the enemy, who fired on our patrols, wounding three men. The attempt of a party of Boers to slip round our left flank and cut off the retreat of the train, was met and effectively checked by a troop of cavalry. The train steamed safely back to Naauwpoort, passing at Tweedale another train going to bring in the wounded, and by way of hospital token flying a flag pieced together by the aid of the doctor's needle and thread from a blind and strips off the guard's signal flag. On November 29th, the enemy, estimated at 300 strong, was found to have vacated the Arundel kopjes. These kopjes were occupied by us on December 7th, but as three squadrons of the

12th Lancers were withdrawn to reinforce Lord Methuen at Modder River, they were subsequently abandoned.

Meanwhile General French's small force was further weakened by the necessity of detailing detachments to guard and patrol the lines of communication entrusted to his charge between Port Elizabeth and Naauwpoort. Colonel Haig went down to Rosmead to select a defensive position, and decided to occupy some hills close to the station, and overlooking a wide plain. With him went two companies of the Berkshires and one squadron of Lancers, under orders to entrench and hold the hills, the infantry on the front, the cavalry on the reverse slope. Almost immediately afterwards General French received orders to withdraw the infantry, and no sooner had he done so than about 100 of the enemy showed themselves at Rosmead Junction, but were kept at bay by the well-timed approach of the cavalry.

An infantry battalion (the 1st Suffolks) had by this time reached Naauwpoort, enabling General French to send three companies to guard the bridges between Tafelberg and Rosmead Junction, and to employ a detachment of the Prince Alfred Volunteer Guards on patrol duty between Rosmead and the destroyed Thebus bridge on the Rosmead-Stormberg line. It was here that we captured the Boer Venter, whose farm was known to be an intelligence station and a depôt for the distribution of arms.

Between November 30th and December 9th the troops made several important movements. One battalion of Suffolks, the second half of the battalion of the Black Watch, three squadrons of the Carabiniers, the New Zealand Mounted Rifles (400 strong), the whole under Colonel Porter, with R. and O. batteries

of horse-artillery and two 15-pounder breach-loading guns, arrived as reinforcements, as a set-off to the first half battalion of the Black Watch and three squadrons of the 12th Lancers withdrawn to join Lord Methuen. The first arrivals enabled General French to resume active operations, and to follow up the minor reconnaissances of the week ending December 7th.

On the morning of Friday, December 7th, Colonel Porter, with the Carabiniers, was ordered to entrain for a point south of Tweedale, the detrainment to be covered by the New Zealand Mounted Rifles, who had gone on at an earlier hour. Porter was then to advance, seize a hill north of Arundel, and bivouac there. The following morning at dawn his patrols were to be out reconnoitring towards Rensburg, in readiness to push home the reconnaissance the moment the New Zealand men came up with them.

General French arrived from Naauwpoort that morning at six as arranged. Porter seized a hill three and a half miles north of Arundel, and discovered that the Boers were holding a series of hills called Taiboschlaagte, which lay in a south-easterly direction from Rensburg. The General followed up the reconnaissance, his mounted troops holding the front and the cavalry working round the flanks, disclosing a continuation of the Boer position running parallel with and athwart the railway. The Boers opened fire from three directions and could be seen with about 100 men bringing an additional heavy gun into action. The reconnaissance determined the Boer strength at about 3,000 men, in what the General believed to be their main position. A prisoner admitted the presence of 3,000 Boers at Colesberg, stating also that Grobelaar with 1,900 men was awaiting at Burghersdorp a reinforcement of 600 Orange

Free Staters, his intention being to co-operate with General Schoeman at Colesberg. This piece of evidence confirmed General French's suspicion that the Boers' comparatively weak position, 13 miles wide south and south-east of Colesberg, had been taken up to afford connection with another commando.

Colonel Porter, directed to patrol widely east and north-east and to report at once any movement of the enemy, learnt that the Boers had extended their right six and a half miles to Kuilfontein and to Vaalkop five miles north-west of Rensburg. He sent a detachment of cavalry to attack these positions, and succeeded in occupying Vaalkop, with small loss to the enemy and none to ourselves. He was also directed to dispose his strength in such a way as to checkmate any attempted movement of the enemy on our extreme right. His forces were seven squadrons of cavalry, two companies of infantry, and a battery of horse-artillery, and were thus disposed: the kopjes round Arundel formed his centre and were occupied by two companies of the Berkshires, the mounted infantry on the right, the New Zealand Mounted Rifles holding the neck and hills on the left; six squadrons of cavalry, with four guns of R. battery, formed his right wing, thrown out two or three miles eastwards; Vaalkop to the westward, held by one squadron and two guns, protected his left.

On December 13th Colonel Porter with the cavalry successfully headed off and drove back a party of 1,800 Boers whom an officer's patrol had discovered at four o'clock that morning working in a southerly direction towards Naauwpoort. Some of the enemy showed activity on their right, but were driven off Kuilfontein farm by our guns on Vaalkop. During the day's fighting they left behind 40 killed and

wounded, our casualties being one officer and seven men wounded. These successes called forth a congratulatory message from General Buller.

On December 17th, finding himself strong enough to hold the enemy at Rensburg, General French decided to transfer his headquarters from Naauwpoort to Arundel and assume the command in person.

Briefly then the situation was as follows: the enemy held the Rensburg hills, which run through Rensburg in a south-easterly direction surrounded by a wide plain, except on the left where their ridges connect with the south-east spurs of the Colesberg hills. From the number and strength of the enemy General French judged this to be the Boers' main position. The west of the railway was held by 800 Transvaalers and one big gun. The east was defended by 2,000 Free Staters, with two guns and breast-works thrown up on the crests of the hills. About 600 men guarded the camp at Colesberg.

Our own forces held the Arundel hills, which, securely fortified, were the pivot from which the cavalry manœuvred against the flank of the enemy. This position was occupied by half a battalion of infantry. The main body of the cavalry and mounted infantry commanded the country for 10 miles on either side of the railway, screening Naauwpoort and the railway, and effectively covering Hanover road and Rosmead. Any movement on the part of the enemy could be watched by detachments patrolling between Rosmead and Arundel and between Hanover road and Arundel. This admirable tactical position, a barrier to any forward movement of the enemy, enabled us to hold him at Rensburg, to manœuvre round his flanks, and eventually to force his retreat on Colesberg and, it was hoped, his ultimate withdrawal across the Orange River.

General French had the choice of three objectives: (1) the kopjes immediately south of Colesberg; (2) the Rietfontein kloof six miles north of Colesberg; (3) the Wagon Bridge road north-west of Colesberg—important, as the enemy's communications lay across it.

The objection to the first was that the hills lay too close together, and being strong in themselves detachments of the Boers could have detained us there while the main body effected their escape. In General French's opinion, supposing the bridge should be selected for our crossing the Orange River into the Free State, a combined movement on it and the kloof offered the best chance of success.

General French appointed Major-General Brabazon his second in command, and organised the troops at Arundel into a division to operate within two zones separated by the railway.[1] Half a battalion of the Royal Berkshire, with two field-guns, under Major McCracken, were to entrench and fortify the ridges immediately north of Arundel station, to cover the camp, and hold the position at all costs. The area west of the railway was entrusted to the 2nd cavalry brigade, and the zone east of it to the 1st. Their task was to prevent the camp being disturbed without due cause, and if the enemy were to advance in force, to delay him till the remainder of the division could turn out and take him in the flanks. To this end detach-

[1] 1st Cavalry Brigade: Colonel Porter. The Carabiniers (6th Dragoon Guards), the New South Wales Lancers (two squadrons), Mounted Infantry (one company), New Zealand Mounted Rifles (about one squadron).

2nd Cavalry Brigade: Colonel Fisher. 6th (Inniskilling) Dragoons, 10th Hussars, Mounted Infantry (one company).

Divisional Troops. One Brigade Division Royal Horse-Artillery. Colonel Eustace.

Bearer Company, &c.

ments of the cavalry and infantry with a machine gun were posted to protect certain tactical points towards the front and flanks of the camp, while a squadron was to be in readiness within to sally out at any moment.

Having firmly established his position at Arundel, General French lost no time in pushing forward incessantly the harassing tactics which hitherto had worked successfully, and which, tending to confuse the enemy, enabled him to continue his own advance and frustrate whatever aggressive plans may have been contemplated against him. On December 18th, desirous of ascertaining the strength of the enemy's left flank, an attack on a farm called Jasfontein, which constituted the left rear of the hostile position, was planned and carried into effect. Under cover of a battery of horse-artillery, Major A. H. Robin, with his force of New Zealand Mounted Rifles, advanced on the farm and succeeded in driving the enemy out. A vigorous attempt to recapture the position was made under cover of a heavy artillery fire ; but tenaciously clinging to the ground they had won, and disregarding the relentless shell and rifle fire which burst on them from all sides, the New Zealanders stood fast until our artillery came up and forced the enemy to retreat.

Again on our left, officers' patrols were reconnoitring the enemy's right ; and on one occasion Captain Lawrence, with two officers and eight men of the Carabiniers, supported by a squadron of the regiment, contrived to approach within four miles of Colesberg and behind the rear of the enemy's right flank.

The time from December 17th to the 30th is one long record of repeated reconnaissances, and of harassing tactics on the enemy's positions, convoys, and lines of communication, which proved too much even for the proverbial phlegm of the Boers. By the

end of the month our object had been achieved, for a retrograde movement of the Boers upon Colesberg was everywhere in evidence.

The immediate result of this retirement was their evacuation of Rensburg. In the early morning of December 30th, General French, accompanied by some cavalry and artillery, was able to push forward a reconnaissance beyond that place, and satisfy himself that Colesberg was still in the hands of the enemy and would have to be his next objective. Surrounded as this village is by groups of high and stony hills, forming natural forts and buttresses and affording complete shelter to the enemy, he could only hope to feel his way by an actual display of force.

Approaching from the south Colonel Porter turned his guns on the face of the ridges directly confronting his advance. The enemy, responding from the south-western corner of the position, disclosed their whereabouts. This immediately led to our occupation of Porter's Hill, a position corresponding to their own and some 2,000 yards distant, which was garrisoned by artillery, cavalry, and mounted infantry.

Having established Rensburg siding as the new base of operations along the railway line, our next move was to explore the western side of the Colesberg position with a view to securing a coign of vantage, from which it might be possible to extend and work round the enemy's position, and force him to evacuate the town. A very careful reconnaissance led to the occupation of Maeder's farm, five miles to the south-west of Colesberg. It was decided to make a night attack on two hills, an operation which, if successful, would in all probability render the main end in view easy of achievement.

The attacking column under Lieut.-Colonel Fisher,

composed of the Inniskilling Dragoons, the 10th Hussars, 10 guns (O. and R. batteries), and four companies of the Berkshires, formed up at nightfall, and reaching Maeder's farm at nine was there joined by General French and his Staff. The dispositions for the operations were as follows: Major McCracken, with his four companies of Berkshires, was to leave his camp about an hour after midnight and attempt to carry a commanding hill which formed our first objective, the cavalry and artillery following close up, in order to be ready to undertake such duties as necessity and expediency might call for. Advancing noiselessly under cover of darkness, leaving Coleskop on their left, the Berkshires got within easy reach of their destination, and then making a bold and gallant rush, dashed up the hill, swept before them the strong picket, which had been taken wholly unawares, and as the day was dawning were in possession of the position which thereafter was to be known as McCracken's Hill. This operation successfully accomplished, the cavalry was despatched to seize some hills commanding the north-western position of the enemy, and then, gradually working round from there to the north, push vigorously ahead, threaten the adversary's lines of retreat, and in the resulting confusion, if possible in combination with the other operations simultaneously proceeding, force the evacuation of Colesberg.

The first part of the instructions was effectually carried out, and Fisher succeeded in seizing a position overlooking the Wagon Bridge road. While this movement was in progress, and for the purpose of diverting the enemy's attention from the danger threatening from the north, the guns opened a combined fire on the western face of the Boer position.

This was vigorously responded to by the hostile artillery, which subjected our gunners to a very hot, though fortunately not destructive, fire. Simultaneously, Porter was occupying the enemy's attention in the south-east. Coming from Rensburg with two squadrons of the Inniskillings, one squadron of New Zealand Rifles, and two horse-artillery guns, he reinforced the New Zealand Mounted Infantry and Carabiniers holding Porter's Hill, and most spiritedly engaged the Boers in the position confronting him. The position had previously been bombarded from Porter's Hill by Thompson's guns, but their searching shell-fire elicited no response. This silence might have been taken to indicate that the ridges were untenanted; but, however that might be, Porter considered that by occupying them he would materially assist General French's plans, and he therefore resolved upon seizing the salient point lying opposite to the bivouac. Accordingly he sent a troop of the Carabiniers under Lieutenant Rundle, of the New Zealanders under Major Robin, and of the New South Wales Lancers, across the plain to work upwards from the base of the hill. There was no sign of opposition until they were within 600 yards of the crest, when they were suddenly held up by a heavy rifle fire. The attack culminated in a gallant, though unavailing, attempt on the part of the New Zealanders to dislodge the enemy and secure a foothold. The Boer rifle fire was too severe to be withstood, and the assailants had, perforce, to fall back. Their retirement necessitated the utmost caution, as the Boer bullets pursued them at every step; but hot though the fire was, it was badly directed, and eventually our men were once more under cover of their own guns, and found their way into camp without loss of life. As the day progressed, General Schoeman, with

1,000 Boers, sought to relieve our pressure by an attempt to outflank Porter's force; but, by the vigilance of the Carabiniers and some of Rimington's Scouts, who were posted at Jasfontein farm to guard our extreme right, the movement was observed in good time and repelled. Meanwhile, the progress of the cavalry in the north was not so satisfactory as had been expected; the enemy had anticipated danger from that direction, and pushing ahead reinforcements, secured advantageous points from which we failed to move them. Our losses for the day were one officer killed, four men wounded, and one man missing.

The net result of these operations was that, although the enemy had not been driven out of Colesberg, we had succeeded in securing new positions, which on a future occasion could be turned to profitable account. But to hold these positions and to manœuvre the enemy out of those he held round Colesberg, additional troops were necessary, and General French made an urgent appeal for another battalion of infantry, two squadrons of cavalry, and one battery.

On January 22nd General Brabazon took command of our left flank, and four companies of the Suffolks under Lieut.-Colonel A. T. Watson relieved the 10th Hussars and occupied the position taken by the cavalry on the preceding day.

Briefly, then, the situation was this: four companies of Suffolks held the hill near Camp Kloof; the Berkshires and mounted infantry occupied McCracken's Hill; the 2nd brigade of cavalry and one battery were camped at Maeder's farm and the windmill; one squadron of cavalry was detached to a position north of the Suffolks to protect their flank; a section of artillery remained near Coleskop in support of either

Suffolks or Berkshires; and the 1st brigade continued to hold the advanced position at Rensburg. The General's headquarters were at Rensburg siding (Taaiboschlaagte), and General Brabazon himself was at Maeder's farm.

While our forces continued to harass the enemy's lines of communication and generally maintain the aggressive, the Boers contented themselves with sniping chiefly from Gibralter Bluff to the north-west of McCracken's Hill, and with prosecuting desultory tactics. So it continued until January 4th, when heavy firing from the direction of Grassy Hill, about three miles north of Colesberg, indicated that some new and more definite operations were in progress. These resolved themselves into a determined effort on the part of the enemy, estimated at 1,000 strong, to turn our left and drive the Suffolks out of the position which threatened the Boer communications on the Wagon Bridge road. Eluding the vigilance of the cavalry outposts on our extreme left, the enemy had at an early hour established a strong foothold in that quarter, from which it became imperative for us to dislodge them. Already they had driven in our pickets and opened a terrific fire with four guns and pom-poms on the positions held by the Berkshires and Suffolks. Taking in the situation at a glance, General French immediately hurried the 10th Hussars and two guns under Fisher to our left, with instructions to take the enemy on one flank; a squadron of the Inniskillings was detailed to take them on another, while four guns of O. battery poured in a galling fire from the front. The bulk of the enemy were by these measures compelled to retire in confusion across the veldt, pursued closely by the 10th Hussars and the Inniskillings under Captain

Herbert. A party of Boers, however, continuing to hold on to the position and to pour a heavy rifle fire on our advancing cavalry, Fisher dismounted his men, charged the position on foot, and pressing home his attack, drove back the defenders and carried one end of the ridge in spirited style.

But the resistance of the enemy had even then not ceased. Some 200 Boers, remaining under cover, still stuck to the fight, a heavy shell fire from front and flank notwithstanding. Determined to crush the last remnant of opposition, General French ordered Captain de Lisle to make a final attack with some 200 mounted infantry. Advancing carefully under cover of our artillery, making use of all dead ground and protection which the position offered, he worked his way through a hollow, dismounted, attacked along the ridge, and carried it with conspicuous gallantry. The enemy did not wait to see the end; as many of them as could made off, leaving some 20 of their number prisoners in our hands.

Considering the obstinacy of the enemy, and the advantageous positions they had secured, our losses during the day were surprisingly small, being only six killed, including Major Harvey of the 10th Hussars, and 15 wounded, including Major Alexander of the 10th and Lieutenant Gibson of the Inniskillings. The Boer loss was very much heavier, amounting to 90 killed and wounded. Yet the sacrifice was unavailing, as their attack had signally failed. General Schoeman's report of the affair to the State President at Bloemfontein is interesting:

4th January. Heavy cannon and small-arm fire near Colesberg all morning. One of the hills occupied by enemy, retaken by Commandant von Dam. (Later.) Small-arm-fire and maxim very heavy. Bullets now falling into town. (Later.) Heavy fighting so far to our disadvantage. Most of the Commandos have abandoned position. Bethlehem

Commando cut off. Am doing utmost to extricate them. (On the 5th.) Fighting all round Colesberg. Heavy fighting since Monday. Positions remain unchanged. Big hill very near town taken by enemy on Monday. Five killed and nine wounded on our side. Must however be more casualties as fight continues. Enemy have about thirty-five guns and our positions are being shelled from all sides.

No time was lost by General French in resuming the operations where they had been left on the 2nd. The fighting of the previous days, supplemented by careful reconnaissances, had made it abundantly clear that Grassy Hill, which forms the most southerly extremity of the positions commanding the Wagon Bridge road and dominates the railway-station, was the key to Colesberg, and that with its capture the town would be ours. The opportune arrival of considerable reinforcements, consisting of the Essex Regiment (910 men), two companies of Yorkshires (199 men of all ranks), the 4th battery of field-artillery (five officers and 165 men), increased the eagerness and confidence with which the General looked forward to that enterprise. He had determined that the entire column should be brought into action.[1]

It was suspected, because of a laager disclosed six miles north of Colesberg at Plessis Poort, with a gun west of Wagon Bridge road, that the Boers, besides their main position along the hills south-east of Colesberg, held another position between Colesberg and the poort.

General French awaited their chief fire from Gibraltar Hill and the hill east of McCracken's.

The plan of attack was to assemble troops in readiness near Camp Kloof; the 4th field-battery, 50

[1] The force available for the actual attack on Grassy Hill was as follows:—Eight guns horse-artillery, six guns field-artillery, four squadrons of cavalry (Inniskillings and 10th Hussars), 150 mounted infantry, 10 companies of infantry (Suffolks and Berkshires); the whole to be under the command of Colonel Eustace, R.H.A.

mounted infantry and 10 companies of infantry, while four squadrons of cavalry, 100 mounted infantry, and four horse-artillery guns were to reconnoitre the hill and guard our north flank. The orders directed the troops encamped at Maeder's farm, the windmill, and kloof, to assemble near Kloof Camp, and by five in the morning to be in the following positions :—4th battery field-artillery disposed to fire upon Gibraltar Hill and hill east of McCracken's from three separate points; the Inniskilling Dragoons to occupy the ridge captured the day before and held by the mounted infantry, with the object of guarding our north flank; detachments to reconnoitre towards the ridge of hills leading to the passage through Bastard's Nek and the poort. The 10th Hussars, eight guns horse-artillery, and mounted infantry were to rendezvous in position of readiness in the hollow about half a mile north-west of Kloof Camp, the guns on the right, cavalry on the left, and mounted infantry in rear. The infantry was to be under arms near Kloof Camp.

On January 5th nothing occurred beyond a little sniping kept down by our artillery fire. Night had fallen, the camps were at rest and asleep, when a message arrived from the colonel of the Suffolks to say that he had carefully reconnoitred Grassy Hill situated within 1,000 yards of his outposts, and that he felt confident he could easily take it that night with four companies of his regiment. Repeated reconnaissances had disclosed the hill as unoccupied, and the colonel was certain of success. The opportunity of holding an advantageous position by the morning, possibly without the firing of a shot, and the effect of a surprise on the Boers, weighed with General French, who accordingly gave Colonel

Watson a free hand to act, with instructions, however, to keep him acquainted with any operations he should undertake.

Half an hour after midnight Watson and his four companies were under way. Noiselessly the officers led their men up the slope of the hill, reaching the crest unopposed; but in a few swift moments destruction fell upon the ill-fated expedition.

General French, who had left his camp at Taaiboschlaagte about two hours later to take command at Coleskop, which he had connected by telegraph with Camp Kloof, Maeder's farm, Porter's Hill, and Rensburg, was passing Porter's Hill shortly after three, when his attention was caught by heavy firing followed by an ominous pause and a significant silence.

It is said that Watson had just called his officers together to explain his further movements, when at that very moment, from behind an unseen stone wall on the Colesberg side of the hill, a heavy fire was poured into their midst, killing the colonel, the adjutant, two officers and 23 men, wounding one officer and 20 men, while six officers and 107 men were afterwards found to be missing. Some one, it appears, seeing most of the officers shot down gave the order to retire; 300 men rushed back into camp, while about 150, who remained behind, were surrounded by the enemy. At first they held their ground and refused to give in, but seeing their case to be hopeless and their comrades falling on all sides, the white flag went up and 107 men laid down their arms.

Subsequent information showed that Delarey, who arrived on the scene that very day, had decided on the occupation of this position, and late in the afternoon

100 Johannesburg Police, without supports, were despatched to hold Grassy Hill. That the Boer leaders had become alarmed as to our intentions in that direction may be inferred from the telegrams despatched the day before the attack on Grassy Hill. General Grobelaar telegraphed from Colesberg Bridge: "According to information the whole cordon open for a distance of eight hours on horseback—men are wanted—send reinforcements—enemy on two sides of Colesberg." And Commandant Naude telegraphed from Colesberg: "Send reinforcements at once—enemy all round us—some of the commandos cannot be depended on—horses are knocked up." The night attack certainly took the policemen completely by surprise; and in the opinion of those best able to judge, had our men held their ground, allowing time to the six companies in support to come up, Grassy Hill or Suffolk Hill, as with its mournful association it since came to be known, should have been ours.

After this untoward incident, observing that the Boers had gone to work to strengthen their right, General French immediately concentrated his attention on their left, and sent out a squadron of the Household Cavalry, newly arrived, to reconnoitre in that direction. The enemy, however, brought up two guns and compelled the squadron to retire under heavy fire; but with the exception of Captain Ricardo and four men missing we had no casualties.

On the following day, Tuesday, January 9th, Colonel Porter, with three squadrons of the Carabiniers, the New Zealand Mounted Rifles, and four guns of O. battery, proceeded with the General and Staff eastwards, and reached Slingersfontein in the course of the morning. With the object of concealing his intentions on the right of the railway, General French

ordered a general bombardment by 12 guns along the enemy's front, from Camp Kloof to Porter's Hill, and attacked, with a section of O. battery and a squadron of Inniskillings, the south front of the enemy's position near the railway, drawing the fire of two long-range guns and two quick-firers.[1]

From Coleskop the enemy's positions were closely watched and clearly discernible. The Boers held the ridges south-east of Colesberg town, and, to guard Wagon Bridge road from the west, were busy entrenching a ridge which connects with another at Plessis Poort, six miles north of Colesberg, where they maintained a second position. Their supply-wagons no longer took the wagon-road, but reached the laagers by a cross-country route.

On January 11th, at daybreak, General French, with Porter, his cavalry and horse-artillery, proceeded to bombard a Boer laager east of Colesberg and to cut the telegraph-line. The enemy came out, and, having occupied Slinger's Ridge which commands the railway from the east, checked the advance; and

[1] General French's entire force between Naauwpoort and his advanced positions now mustered about 4,500 strong, disposed as follows: Four companies of the Berkshires, two of the Essex, and two of mounted infantry held defensive positions on the west and north-west of Colesberg town, from which guns could command Wagon Bridge road to Colesberg bridge. Three miles north-west of this position at Windmill were two squadrons of cavalry. Three miles south of Windmill at Maeder's farm were two companies of the Essex, two squadrons of cavalry, one battery of horse and one of field-artillery. Between Maeder's farm and Rensburg (a distance of seven miles) on a ridge projecting south-west of the enemy's position were half a squadron of cavalry, two companies of the Yorkshires, and two guns. The garrison of Rensburg consisted of half a battalion of infantry, two squadrons of cavalry, and two guns. At Slinger's farm, ten miles north-east of Rensburg and about three miles from the enemy's left flank, were six squadrons of cavalry, the New Zealand Mounted Rifles, one battery of horse-artillery, and two companies of the Yorkshires; this position commanded the enemy's communications with Norval's Pont.

when we tried to outflank them, the Boers, extending their left, threatened our right. Meanwhile Major Hunter-Weston, who, with half a squadron of cavalry and a party of Royal Engineers, had been sent out to work round the enemy's left to the railway and cut the telegraph, was foiled at the very moment when success seemed imminent.

Seeing, now, that the enemy were beginning to bestow too much attention upon our right, General French again resumed harassing tactics on the west. A bombardment of the Boer laagers on this side was opened; and a reconnaissance of cavalry and mounted infantry, under Captain de Lisle, pushing north of Bastard's Nek, found the enemy to be holding Plessis Poort in force and also a ridge close up to Bastard's Nek.

One 15-pounder belonging to the 4th battery field-artillery, which Major Butcher had succeeded in dragging to the summit of Coleskop, a sheer and almost inaccessible height rising 800 feet from the plain, began shelling at a range of 5,100 yards, increased by the extreme elevation to 7,000 yards. By these means they were kept busy and on the strain, but reconnaissances disclosed the important fact that they were being largely reinforced and were extending their positions. At the same time advices from Natal warned the General that the Boers were contemplating heavy attacks on the Orange River and Colesberg positions, and he had therefore to prepare for the contingency of the enemy assuming the offensive. With this object he now set about garrisoning, provisioning, and entrenching Kloof Camp, Maeder's, and Rensburg.

Withdrawing the infantry from Porter, he desired him to camp on a light scale ready for sudden action, and with a view to inducing the Boers to divide

their forces, he sent out, on January 13th, Major Allenby, with one squadron of Inniskillings, one of the 10th Hussars, two companies of mounted infantry, and two guns, round Bastard's Nek, to reconnoitre towards the Wagon Bridge road, and also to threaten or, if possible, damage the bridge. Major Allenby marched along the Zeekoe River for seven miles, and then, turning eastward into a plain stretching to the bridge, shelled it at a range of 5,000 yards. The attitude of the enemy was so mysterious that, not to be caught in any trap, Major Allenby ordered a retirement, when the enemy suddenly sprang into activity and attempted to cut off his retreat. Their effort failed, however, and our men reached camp without suffering any casualties.

Reinforcements were now rapidly arriving, and between the 13th and 22nd of January the force around Colesberg was strengthened by no less than 3,784 infantry.

In the meantime Lord Roberts had arrived and taken over the supreme command, with Lord Kitchener as his Chief of the Staff. General Kelly-Kenny was on his way north to assume the command of Naauwport and the line south, while General French was left in command of the line north of Naauwport, with instructions to keep General Kelly-Kenny acquainted with all his dispositions and movements.

The Boer preparations eventuated in an attack on January 15th. This was heralded by heavy firing in the early morning, and culminated in an impetuous movement against our advanced positions at Slingersfontein. At the first onset the enemy seemed to carry all before them, but by a change of fortune their early success was promptly turned into a serious reverse, and they were driven back with substantial loss.

An eminence, which thenceforth came to be known as New Zealand Hill, and which in some of its features was a miniature of Majuba, that mountain of melancholy memory, was at this time held by us. Unperceived the Boers had, at an early hour, crept up from their main position near Colesberg, along the ridge which runs nearly due east from the Colesberg heights. A gap intervenes between this ridge and the adjoining New Zealand Hill, on which lay a company of the Yorkshire Regiment and one of the New Zealand Mounted Rifles. The tactics which procured the Boer victory at Majuba were again tried on this occasion. To bombard the crest-line and so force our men back from all points of observation, while the slopes of the hill were being scaled,—such was the ingenious device, sanctioned by a historic success, which was once more to be practised. Up to a certain point the analogy held good. The Yorkshires were compelled to take cover, and two bodies of Boers, working round the base of the hill, escaped their notice. Assisted by stretches of dead ground, and under cover of a vigorous bombardment, the assailants wormed their way up the hill-side and crept close to the flanks of our men. The Yorkshires became apprehensive of lurking danger, but did not expect it in the direction from which it actually came. They did not look for an attack up the precipitous northern slopes, and were scanning the easier eastern ascent for signs of the enemy. In that direction they did perceive some movement developing, and, to repel any assault there, they withdrew from a donga which they had been occupying, and concentrated under the protection of a stone wall. Events proved, however, that the enemy, in attracting attention to the eastern acclivity, had been masking his real

intention. Steep and difficult as the north-western escarpment was, it had been chosen as the path by which the attack was to be pushed home. Stealthily taking cover from boulder to boulder, a number of Boers had noiselessly effected a good lodgement on the crest. With the suddenness of a thunderbolt from a clear sky, a scathing fire was poured upon the rudely surprised Yorkshires at a range of no farther than about 50 yards. Captain Orr fell wounded, and the sergeant-major was killed ; rendered practically leaderless the plight of our men became critical, and they were falling fast. At this moment, as good fortune would have it, Captain Maddox of the Royal Artillery, with some of the New Zealand Mounted Rifles, appeared on the scene. He took in the situation at a glance, rallied the remaining Yorkshires, and courageously faced the impact of the Boers who were now rushing in to make good their attack. From the entrenchments the Yorkshires greeted them with a galling fire, but that was not enough ; a bayonet-charge alone could save the situation. Not a moment was to be lost, and Captain Maddox did not hesitate. "Fix bayonets," he ordered ; quick to obey, the eager New Zealanders following his lead, swept with a rush against the enemy, who gave way as usual before the cold steel. Pell-mell they flung themselves down the steeps which they had so furtively ascended, the confusion of their headlong flight being worse confounded by a hailstorm of stones and bullets. They left on the ground 21 dead and a large number of wounded to bear witness of the discomfiture and disaster which had attended their daring enterprise. Our casualties, on the other hand, were small—one officer being killed, and 11 rank and file wounded.

General Clements, commanding the 12th brigade of

the 6th division, reached Rensburg on January 10th, and was taken over the Slingersfontein position by General French, and appointed to relieve Porter, who, with three squadrons of the Carabiniers, two squadrons of Household Cavalry, one company of New Zealanders, the New South Wales Lancers, and four guns moved eastwards on to Potfontein. The Worcesters and Royal Irish, just come up from Naauwport, reinforced Slingersfontein, a demonstration from which place disclosed a large Boer laager at Keron, which we shelled with good effect.

North-east of Potfontein (20 miles east of Rensburg) Major Rimington and his Guides held a position at Kleinfontein; beyond, at Rhenoster farm, a squadron of Household Cavalry had to vacate their outpost, as the Boers, about 1,000 strong, were showing considerable activity round that district. The Boers made no further attempts to take the initiative, and our tactics being confined to holding the enemy in their positions and guarding our own flanks, nothing more of importance happened in the neighbourhood of Slingersfontein up to the time of General French's departure for Orange River on February 7th.

On the west of the railway we continued to carry on our harassing tactics with undiminished vigour. Colonel Eustace dragged another 15-pounder up the steep craggs of Coleskop and fired at convoys entering the enemy's domain, actually scattering drivers and escorts at a range of 9000 yards. Two five-inch howitzers, which had come up from Orange River, were sent to Maeder's farm, and shelled Grassy Hill and the kopjes adjoining McCracken's with remarkable accuracy.

The Boers kept quiet till January 20th, when they suddenly directed a brisk fire from near the railway

towards Porter's Hill. The troops were aroused and stood to arms, but the fire ceased by midnight and nothing further happened. Evidently the object of this disquieting fusillade was to conceal a movement eastwards, and a few days later, January 23rd, the patrols reported a movement of wagons towards Norval's Pont.

Reverting to his original idea of dislodging the enemy from Colesberg by a flank movement to their right and of seizing the Wagon bridge, General French sent two companies of the Yorkshires, two companies of the Wiltshires, and four companies of the Bedfordshires to Maeder's farm, and ordered Captain de Lisle to reconnoitre from there towards Bastard's Nek. The result of this reconnaissance led the General to make his last attempt to drive the enemy from British territory before he left for Modder River.

The real attack he planned on the enemy's right, but their front and left were to be kept engaged by combined attacks from our position.[1]

The object of the operation was to cut off the enemy from his main line of communication and of retreat by the capture of the heights commanding the defile known as Plessis Poort, through which the main road passes to the Wagon bridge. A long-backed ridge strikes off from Bastard's Nek towards the kloof, and ends in a bluff facing a bold, steep

[1] General Brabazon, Colonel Stevenson, Colonel Eustace, and Major McCracken were the officers commanding. By six o'clock on the evening of January 24th, the following forces were ordered to assemble at Hobkirk's farm and bivouac there for the night. Under command of General Brabazon two squadrons 10th Hussars, one squadron Inniskillings, four guns R. battery: under command of Colonel Stevenson, 2nd Wiltshires, four companies Yorkshires, two companies Essex: mounted infantry under Captain De Lisle. A flying column under Major Allenby was to bivouac at Plessis farm (Sevenfontein). Two companies Bedfordshires were to camp at Camp Kloof, and two at Maeder's farm.

hill on the other side of the defile known as Rietfontein. General Brabazon with his artillery was to post himself well forward on a hill to the north-west, commanding these positions but well in the rear of them, and was, from his point of vantage which commanded the country opposite to him, to bombard the hills preparatory to the employment of the infantry. Sunrise saw General French at Bastard's Nek giving orders to Brabazon and the mounted troops to move north of Rietfontein ridge and shell it from a position north-west of Plessis Poort.

By seven o'clock the Yorkshires had relieved the mounted infantry under De Lisle, who had held on to a high elevation about one mile and a half north-east of Bastard's Nek all night, and three hours later Rietfontein Poort was being shelled by Brabazon's four guns from a position 2,400 yards to the north-west. The two companies of the Essex pushed along the ridge extending from Bastard's Nek, and the Wiltshires held a ridge west of the main line of kopjes. Three guns of the 4th battery field-artillery came across over Bastard's Nek, took up a position at the northern extremity of the Wiltshire ridge, and shelled the poort. Major McCracken made a demonstration from Camp Kloof, and the howitzer and guns on Coleskop joined in a bombardment which soon became general. Down the line of front four companies of infantry, one troop of cavalry, and two guns from Porter's Hill engaged the enemy, and beyond Slingersfontein General Clements made a demonstration towards Keron Laager near Achtertang, Porter co-operating towards Norval's Pont with two guns and the cavalry.

The infantry on the main ridge having gradually worked up to within 1500 yards of the poort, at half-

past two Colonel Stevenson ordered the Wiltshires to advance at wide intervals across the plain and seize a position within 800 yards of the Boers. It was now late in the day, and Stevenson, noting scarcely any sign of life, asked for permission to drive the attack home. Though attracted by the fair promise of an easy success, the fact that the cavalry had not pushed sufficiently far forward to turn the position and had given the enemy an opportunity of taking up a strong defence, combined with their silence, made General French suspect a trap, and with great self-restraint he negatived the suggestions and ordered a retirement.

Hardly had the Wiltshires turned about than the Boers unmasked their position, the silent ridges suddenly bursting into flame as the enemy opened a fierce fire on the retiring troops. Our casualties, however, were very small, 10 wounded representing the total for the day.

Disappointed by the day's events, which closed his opportunities in the direction of the Wagon Bridge road, General French rode back to Rensburg from Bastard's Nek late in the evening, having satisfied himself that the infantry, after a well-ordered retirement, were safely on their way back to camp.

On January 29th Lord Roberts summoned General French to Cape Town, and entrusted to him the responsible task of relieving Kimberley. On February 3rd he returned to Rensburg, and on the 6th was on his way to Modder River.

When General French left for Cape Town on January 29th, the Boers, strongly entrenched, held Colesberg with about 8000 men, five field-guns, two long-range guns, and five smaller quick-firers; there was also a big gun at Colesberg and one at

Achtertang. Any effort to dislodge them would have required the whole attention of a much larger force than was then available.

Two alternatives had suggested themselves to General French; either to move eastwards from Arundel north of Zuurberg in the direction of Kroomhoogte, to relieve, if necessary, the pressure on Stormberg, or, by transferring the base to Orange River, to carry on operations in the Free State towards Bloemfontein. The latter course he especially favoured as having the merit of surprising the Boers, who never expected us to quit the line of railway. But now that he had a very different series of operations in view, it was only necessary to keep a sufficient force to hold up the Boers in their Colesberg position. He left behind, for this purpose, about 1000 local or Colonial troops and a brigade of infantry, and withdrew the regular cavalry.

With the withdrawal of large numbers of our troops, and the simultaneous reinforcement of the Boers by the arrival of Delarey's important commando, General Clements was left by General French to a very difficult task.

On February 12th the Boers made a determined attack on three companies of Worcesters holding an isolated ridge near Slingersfontein. Slipping up in the night the enemy had captured part of the hill, when they were met with the steady fire of the brave Worcesters and found themselves prevented from advancing further. The colonel and major fell under the hot fire; but Halket Pain came forward, and exhorting the men to stand their ground, brought a gun to bear on the Boer side of the hill and forced them to retire with a loss of many killed and wounded.

The Boers also attacked and surrounded some

companies of the Wiltshires, who were holding the same hill on the left. The Victorian Rifles came to their support, and making a gallant counter attack, saved the position. The Victorians lost Major Eddy and six officers, besides many of their men killed and wounded.

Finding the Boers too strong General Clements was obliged to retire with his whole force on Rensburg. On the way two companies of Wiltshires were unfortunately cut off and captured. On February 14th he withdrew to Arundel, and from there protected the lines of communication.

Later on, the pressure on his front being relieved by Lord Roberts's move to Paardeberg, General Clements determined to clear the country to Norval's Pont. On February 27th he drove the Boers out of Rensburg, kept them on the move and occupied Colesberg. Early in March, unable to prevent the enemy from blowing up Norval's Pont bridge, he threw a pontoon across the Orange River, and, carrying his forces into the Orange Free State, proceeded to pacify the districts to the south-west.

The altered conditions of warfare make it doubly important to obtain early and accurate information of the movements of the enemy, and at the same time make it doubly difficult to obtain such information, especially in a country in which the inhabitants are either hostile or untrustworthy. It is therefore all the more remarkable, and the more creditable, that, in carrying out the foregoing operations, General French sustained no serious reverse, with the exception of the disaster to the Suffolks, and on no occasion committed himself to an action without being prepared to meet any subsequent developments. By taking up his own position on commanding ground from which

he could obtain a wide view of the barren and apparently lifeless country which masked the movements of his enemy, by an admirably devised system of signalling, and by the free use of patrols scouting widely to his flanks, he invariably succeeded in detecting at an early stage the flanking or enveloping movements which formed such an unvarying feature of the tactics of the Boer.

His policy was one of obstruction, prevention, and frustration, which would relieve the pressure upon Generals Methuen and Gatacre. He gave the enemy no rest, continuing to harass them unceasingly, and render it impossible for their commandants to confer and cooperate in an attacking movement. This being his policy, his eye was ever on the Colesberg bridge, which was the nexus of the Boers' communications in the direction of Bloemfontein, probably the most important key to the Free State capital in the event of a general advance by that route.

The tactics that General Buller laid down in connection with the Colesberg operations and on which General French based all his plans were those conveyed in the Fabian principle, "Harass and worry the Boers but take no risks;" and indeed, to successfully meet the situation at Colesberg an excess of care and caution, a persistency of observation, and even more a divining instinct into the changing plans and covert movements of the Boers, were essential.

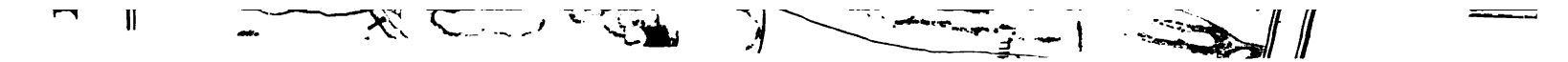
General French's tactics consisted in a series of operations for effective defence against surprise or attack, especially with a view to the offensive by holding the enemy and foiling any designs on the great trunk systems constituting the means of communication. Daily, almost without exception, for ten anxious weeks he personally examined positions,

directed reconnaissances and attacks, and held at bay an enemy established in the fullness of their self-confident reliance after Magersfontein on the one side, Stormberg on the other, and the stubborn repulse of our troops on the Tugela. With only a slender force of mixed troops gathered by the way, he took the field and pushed steadily forward inch by inch gradually and surely up to the Boer position, and once in touch, he hung on tenaciously, adopting manœuvres which forced the enemy back on Colesberg leaving him their positions which served him as a pivot for subsequent operations.

Although hampered in the beginning by his own ineffective strength and the extended front of the Boer position, General French's tactics were directed at demonstrations on the enemy's centre while working round their flanks.

The enemy's position round Colesberg was a particularly strong one, as his flanks and rear were alike well protected by groups of spreading hills south-east of Colesberg Junction, and stretching across Plessis Poort north and west. Only by wide detours could any advantage be gained, and these by their very nature took time, especially as they were executed in the teeth of an alert enemy. The Boers were thus able to counteract the threatened danger by extending their front, and in turn to menace our attenuated lines of attack.

The necessity for keeping back the enemy by flanking movements, which compelled the holding of isolated kopjes and ridges at considerable distances from the centre of our position, widened enormously the theatre of operations, which eventually presented a front upwards of 30 miles in extent. The Boer forces grew by continual additions, but the arrival of



NEIGHBOURHOOD.

GENERAL FRENCH'S OPERATIONS ROUND COLESBERG.

SCENES AT NAAUWPOORT, ON AN ALARM SIGNAL, AFTER THE REPORTED APPROACH OF THE ENEMY.

1. MANNING THE DEFENCES.

2. TROOPS FALL IN AND TENTS ARE STRUCK.

3. GUNS READY FOR ACTION.

General French on the left riding round to inspect.

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1. CAMP AT ARUNDEL.

2. BRINGING NATIVE PRISONERS BLIND-FOLDED INTO ARUNDEL CAMP.

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1. GENERAL FRENCH APPRECIATES THE VALUE OF DEFENCES.

2. LOCATING THE ENEMY.

3. RECONNAISSANCE AND OCCUPATION OF JASFONTEIN FARM (JASFONTEIN).

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1. MAXIM IN ACTION.

2. DEMONSTRATION OF THE CAVALRY AGAINST THE BOER CENTRE.

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1. A "SAND DEVIL" AT RENSBURG.

2. CAVALRY FIGHTING, DISMOUNTED.

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1. "SLOW, BUT SURE."

2. A COSSACK POST.

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1. FRIENDLY MEETING BETWEEN TWO OPPONENTS: GENERAL SCHOEMAN OF COLESBERG NOTE, AND COLONEL EUSTACE. R.H.A. IN COMMAND OF THE ARTILLERY ROUND COLESBERG.

2, 3. CAVALRY DISMOUNTED READY FOR ACTION.

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fresh troops enabled General French to repel every attempt to envelope him. So peculiar was the enemy's organisation, and so lax their discipline, that their actual strength at any given moment was not known, but they must have had at least 8,000 men with several guns.

The long monotony of the 10 weeks' struggle round Colesberg, the incessant skirmishing to and fro over the same ground, the slightly varying results, risks avoided and precautions taken, kopjes seized or vacated, an advance, a falling back, or a gain—such operations, however instructive to the soldier as an expert, may not satisfy the mind of the civilian reader who has come to expect drama in warfare, a series of startling crescendo effects, crises that arrest the attention of Europe, and denouements that can shake the world of London with emotion. Yet the fact remains that, though to all appearances circling round the same hills, working as much backward as forward, ending where he had begun, General French by his skilful tactics had held a powerful body of Boers at Colesberg, had checked their descent into the southern parts of the colony, and had defeated their aspiration to display the Vierkleur across the Cape Peninsular, and had materially influenced, if not absolutely determined, the entire future of the campaign.

This, and nothing less, was his achievement; and in days to come when the thoughtful student pores over the lessons of the great war, he will find in the sterling work performed during every difficult day and night of those anxious weeks around Colesberg a vast field for contemplation and research, an almost inexhaustible store of highly interesting and instructive incident.

CHAPTER III

The Relief of Kimberley

Arriving at Cape Town on January 10th Lord Roberts at once began to prepare for carrying into effect the plan of campaign which Sir Redvers Buller had set aside owing to the concentration of the enemy on Ladysmith. He decided that the line of march should lead by way of Bloemfontein to Pretoria, initiating the operations by a concentration of large forces on the Modder River, forming there an advanced base. The Boers, he knew, imagined that our forces could not separate themselves from the railway. This belief had been confirmed in their minds by examples such as the advance of Lord Methuen from De Aar to the Modder, the operations of General French at Rensburg, of General Gatacre at Stormberg, and of General Buller at Chieveley. Lord Roberts, basing his plans on this illusion, decided to mystify the enemy by making a feint in the direction of the Modder River, while actually arranging to strike for Bloemfontein by transport-roads across the veldt.

At the beginning of February the Boers were in force at Colesberg, and were also strong, under Cronje, at Magersfontein, where, however, they were kept in harmless inaction by Lord Methuen, who, since the

battle of November 10th, had not stirred from the Modder River, except for two successful raids from that centre.

With Bloemfontein as his main objective, Lord Roberts nevertheless designed in the first instance to relieve Kimberley with forces of cavalry followed by infantry. This movement would clear the ground on his left flank and protect his lines of communication from the danger of interruption by Cronje, who would at the same time be cut off at Magersfontein. The execution of the plan would be facilitated by a feint to the westward of Magersfontein, which would direct the attention of Cronje to the safety of his right flank, and appear to threaten the communications between his main body and some small parties of the enemy understood to be raiding and foraging to the west of the railway.

Consequently, while arrangements were secretly in progress for the rapid concentration of the Kimberley relief-force at Ramdam, General Macdonald with a small force of infantry was directed on February 4th to seize Koodoosberg Drift, and construct a field-redoubt in the vicinity. General Babington, with his cavalry, was to co-operate by a movement to the westward along the north bank of the river, while, still further to bewilder the enemy, ostentatious movements of our troops were made to the east of Orange River station, thus hinting at a movement on Bloemfontein by way of Fauresmith. All fell out precisely as the sagacity of Lord Roberts had foreseen. Cronje, alarmed at the threat conveyed by the presence of Macdonald on his right, at once sent detachments to drive him from that position, and proceeded to prolong his entrenchments

to the westward. Meanwhile the new preparations had made good progress, and Macdonald, as though acting under hostile pressure, was withdrawn to the Modder camp on February 8th. The concentration of the mounted troops, and the transport-arrangements, were delicate operations. General French and a considerable number of the cavalry and horse-artillery selected for the relief of Kimberley were at the moment actually in touch with the enemy in the neighbourhood of Colesberg. The withdrawal of these troops without betraying our plans to the Boers confronting them was a task of considerable difficulty, especially as constant reinforcements had brought up the strength of the commandos operating under Schoeman, or in conjunction with him, to approximately 8,000 men. The operation was effected with complete success, the enemy being handsomely deceived by the audacity with which the small body left to watch the extended British position before Colesberg was handled. Some of the troops were sent by rail to the Modder; others, the Carabiniers for instance, were sent to Orange River station, there to join the mounted infantry under Colonel Hannay with orders to march on Ramah, and, crossing the Orange River, to push northwards, subsequently joining General French's division on the march to Kimberley. On February 8th the reorganisation of the cavalry division was arranged in three brigades and a division of mounted infantry in two brigades.[1]

[1] CAVALRY DIVISION. *1st Brigade.* Colonel Porter: Brigade-Major, Captain Vaughan, 7th Hussars. 6th Dragoon Guards (Carabiniers), 2nd Dragoons (Scots Greys), 6th Dragoons (Inniskillings), 14th Hussars, New South Wales Lancers.

2nd Brigade. Colonel Broadwood: Brigade-Major, Captain Hon.

The concentration of the troops attached to each brigade alone remained to be effected. Both Roberts's and Kitchener's Horse, who were to be attached to the division, were with Colonel Broadwood in the neighbourhood of Belmont; Colonel Gordon had not yet arrived from India, and the Carabiniers, with Colonel Hannay and the mounted infantry were still in the neighbourhood of the Orange River station. On February 8th, therefore, only a few days before the march, the cavalry division, on whose operations the plan mainly centred, was still somewhat dispersed; and pending the arrival of their commanding officers, the brigades were temporarily under the orders of the senior regimental officers.

On the evening of February 9th Lord Roberts addressed the officers and men of the cavalry camps, telling them, in a few stirring words, that he entrusted to them,—the largest mounted British division that had ever worked together—the relief of Kimberley. He knew that they would rejoice to have this opportunity of maintaining the splendid traditions of the British cavalry, and that they would carry out the relief with the utmost haste and dash; for the case of Kimberley had become desperate, he having learnt

T. Brand, 10th Hussars. Household Cavalry (three squadrons), 10th Hussars, 12th Lancers.

3rd Brigade. Colonel Gordon: Brigade-Major, Captain Briggs, 1st (King's) Dragoon Guards. 9th Lancers, 16th Lancers.

Total strength of Cavalry Division, 2,754 of all ranks, 2,871 horses.

Royal Horse-Artillery. G., O., Q., R., T., and U. Batteries, with two Ammunition Columns. Total strength, 1,321 of all ranks, 1,401 horses.

MOUNTED INFANTRY DIVISION. *1st Brigade.* Colonel Hannay. 1st, 3rd, 5th, and 7th Regiments.

2nd Brigade. Colonel Ridley. 2nd, 4th, 6th, and 8th Regiments.

Divisional Troops. Field Troop Royal Engineers, and C. Pontoon Troop, Royal Engineers.

that the Boers, with another gun, were shelling, not the men of the garrison only, but the women and children in the crowded town. "The cavalry must relieve Kimberley at all costs," Lord Kitchener had said; "not only the hopeless situation of Ladysmith and the danger throughout Africa, but the risk to the Empire generally demand it. . . . If on arrival at Kimberley the Boers offered resistance, the cavalry must act with decision, and boldly." "You must relieve Kimberley if it costs you half your forces," were Lord Roberts's words, and the British soldier was ready both to meet the cost and endure the hardship.

After a further delay of 24 hours the concentration was complete, and at last the eagerly awaited orders were issued to march at three on the morning of February 11th. Six days' rations were issued for the men and five for the animals, and were partly carried by the supply-column, partly on man and horse.

Advantage was taken of the early morning, before the great heat of the day, to cover as much ground as possible. At first the moon was up, but soon it dropped below the horizon, and in the darkness the column groped its way to the south-east, making for Ramdam. Evidently the resident Boers were taken by surprise, and the few farm-houses passed on the way were so hastily evacuated that in some of them the breakfast-coffee was still hot upon the table. By ten o'clock the main body of the division, after a ride of 22 miles, reached Ramdam, a farmhouse with a big pan of water, where the Brigadiers and most of the mounted troops were to meet on their way north. Colonel Gordon, come straight from India, joined the column, and at once assumed

command of the 3rd brigade. General Tucker with his division marched in from Enslin, and at eight o'clock in the evening Colonel Broadwood arrived with Roberts's and Kitchener's Horse and took command of the 2nd brigade. Colonel Porter and the Carabiniers, Colonel Hannay and Colonel Ridley with the mounted infantry, were still hastening northward, and did not catch up the division till the 13th.

The force thus brought together might have been expected to suffer from the fact that it was a new creation; the Brigadiers were strangers to their commands, the commands themselves were new and the Staffs were new. Yet the combination fell into line with surprising rapidity and precision.

The second day's march was to take the column 12 miles on to the Riet River, effect a crossing, and hold the drift for the infantry, following in their track, to occupy. General French, though anxious to get forward, did not wish to sacrifice life, and recognising from experience what excellent cover a river-bed affords the enemy for purposes of defence, made careful dispositions to secure a passage across the Riet somewhere between Waterval Drift on the north-west and De Kiel Drift on the south-east. He expected the enemy to be in force at Jacobsdaal, with their outposts extended as far as Koffyfontein; even were the De Kiel and adjacent drifts not held, he felt sure they would be under close surveillance.

Colonel Gordon's brigade on the left was to reconnoitre the river in the neighbourhood of Waterval Drift; if it were undefended, he was to cross and hold the approaches; if defended, he was to be content with a feint at crossing a little to the north. Colonel Broadwood's brigade, with a battery of horse-

artillery, forming the right, was directed to reconnoitre the river about De Kiel's Drift and eastwards for some five miles, and also to feign crossing if watched or opposed. The centre column, composed of Colonel Porter's brigade, with Colonel Alexander of the Scots Greys in temporary command, the mounted infantry brigade, and Roberts's and Kitchener's Horse, was to march in the direction of De Kiel's Drift. Each column was ordered to be formed up ready, before marching out of bivouac. Colonel Broadwood's brigade was to lead off at two in the morning, pass in front of Colonel Porter's brigade and halt. Colonel Porter was to form on his left, and Colonel Gordon to the left again, leaving 50 yards' interval between the columns.

By the light of the moon they followed an east-north-easterly direction till half-past three, when darkness having come on, and wishing to take no risk, they halted, starting again in the first greyness of dawn at a quarter to five.

Rimington's Guides, who were ahead reconnoitring, having reported that the country was clear to the river, two squadrons were sent forward. On approaching the river their advanced patrols were met by a heavy fire from some kopjes on the near bank, just above Waterval Drift. General French ordered the 3rd brigade, and a battery of horse-artillery under Colonel Eustace, to their assistance. The guns unlimbered and opened a well-directed fire on the Boer position. The enemy's force, much larger than was at first supposed, replied with a brisk fire on our advance, several shells dropping close to General French and his Staff. Covered by our guns, the division moved off slightly eastwards and took up ground to the right reconnoitred by the 2nd

brigade, which had now occupied two hills south-east of Gordon who, finding the pressure thus removed from his own brigade, gradually drew it off, and made a feint of crossing at Waterval Drift. The Boers, completely deceived, withdrew to the right of the river and keeping down stream lay in wait to oppose them.

Finding that his bait had taken, General French at once made for De Kiel's Drift with the 1st brigade, the mounted infantry, and Roberts's Horse. The banks of the river were very steep and difficult, but by following the track a fordable place was discovered. Some Boers, seeing the cavalry making a dash for the ford, also had a race for it and attempted to dispute the passage, but, outmanœuvred by a boldly-handled party of Roberts's Horse, came up too late to offer more than a show of resistance. Captain Majendie, of the Rifle Brigade, attached to Roberts's Horse, was the only man killed, and but two were wounded.

It was about noon when the drift was seized and the division began to cross the river, to bivouac on the right bank and wait for the baggage-column, which was far back in the rear. Even the muddy waters of a sluggish stream were a blessed sight to the tired men and animals, withered and worn by the scorching sky and burning sands of a remorseless South African day. Wearily they watched for the baggage and supply convoys to come up, but, edged aside by the baggage-column of General Tucker's infantry division, it was midnight before they hove in sight.

The river presented a lively scene with the cavalry, General Tucker's division, and their transport lodged on either side, or struggling up and down the awkward, craggy banks. Some of the transport had been

parked too close to the water and, blocking the outlet, caused a medley of wagons and vehicles to sway backwards and forwards in a lumbering helpless mass of obstructed traffic. Rumblings, creakings, shouts of the coloured team-boys, the cracks of their long whips, and all the noisy confusion of campaigning filled the air with clamour and left the night no peace.

Straggling parties of Boers were finally scattered from Waterval Drift by the 9th and 16th Lancers, and on February 13th, at half-past ten in the morning, the division marched out in line of brigade masses, the guns on the right of the brigades. To prevent delay, the transport was left on the south side of the drift, while the more necessary supplies were brought across by led horses. The baggage-columns were brought up later by an escort of the Carabiniers under Colonel Porter, who had just come in from Orange River. Lord Kitchener arrived on the scene in the evening of the 12th, and the Commander-in-Chief and his Staff rode in next morning; both were well pleased with the result of the day's work, and saw the division march off on its further ventures with the heartiest wishes for its good fortune.

Owing to some firing on the left brigade from the direction of Jacobsdaal, the line of march tended slightly eastward to Blaauwbosch Pan (eight miles north-east of De Kiel's Drift), where fortunately there was a well, though it yielded only enough water to fill three of the bearer-company's carts. To economise the scanty supply for the necessities of the heavy columns of infantry toiling across the sands in the rear, men and animals had to endure their thirst, and hope for relief in a bold endeavour to reach the Modder River before night-fall. A squadron of Kitchener's Horse was left

to protect the well, and await the arrival of the infantry.

By two in the afternoon the column had reached Rooidam and was making for Klip Drift, when, without any warning, the right flank was held up by about 1000 Boers. The guns came into action at once and drove the enemy eastwards out of range; but no sooner had the march been resumed than the enemy was again observed hanging on to the right flank and moving parallel to our line of advance. Thereupon General French, perceiving his chance, abruptly changed the direction of his march to the north-east, and, to mislead the Boer, headed for Klipdraal Drift. Rising to the bait the enemy made off to block the drift. After steadily keeping to his new course for an hour and a half, and pushing on nearly to Middelbosch, the General suddenly swung back to the left, directing Broadwood and Gordon to make for the Klip and Roodewal Drifts respectively, as rapidly as the exhausted condition of their horses would permit. This manœuvre planted the enemy on a wide outer circle, and prevented them from wedging themselves in between the cavalry and the river.

Five miles off a green fringe of bush, standing out in dark relief against the sun-scorched sand, told the wearied men of the water for which they and their thirsty horses had so eagerly panted. An hour later they were there, looking back on those numerous brown heaps, each a dead or exhausted horse, lying out along that wearisome desert waste, under the pitiless sun,—all for the want of a little water.

Even then, fearing that the enemy had knowledge of our advance, General French, while really intending Broadwood's brigade to seize Klip Drift, took the precaution of sending Gordon to the river to

make a feint on Roodewal Drift. The Boers were taken by surprise, and beyond the Modder we could see three laagers full of men in hasty movement.

This was the opportunity. The cavalry, eager to push ahead, looked round for the guns, impatient at the delay, but no guns were in sight, their horses being too exhausted to bring them into camp without a halt. The Boers could not be prevented escaping; but forcing a passage over the drift, covered by four guns of Major Allason's battery which had come up in the interval, the three laagers were captured, full of sheep, supplies, rifles, and ammunition.

The advance had placed the Magersfontein Boers in a very uncomfortable corner. With their main line of retreat to Bloemfontein in our hands, only two routes, by Boshof and to the west of Kimberley, were left open to them.

The passage of the Modder was ours, and orders were at once issued for the bivouac. The 1st and 2nd brigades under Broadwood's command were placed on the right bank of the river; Gordon's brigade was posted at Roodewal Drift, and the mounted infantry under Alderson remained on the left bank, in positions ready to occupy the heights and command the drift in case of attack. An attempt was made to cable the news of the day's operations to the Commander-in-Chief, but the wire having failed, despatches were got through by two plucky riders who volunteered their services. Night again closed in, without any sign of the baggage.

On the 14th, although every moment went to help the enemy assembled to oppose us, a vexatious halt was necessary. A premature advance of the cavalry before the following infantry had joined up would at once leave Cronje with an open road to Bloemfontein, and

lessen the advantages of our position across his communications. Before further progress could be made the infantry must come up and hold the drifts. Early in the morning General French rode round his outposts.

The enemy betrayed their presence by firing a few harmless shells into our camp from a long-range gun near their main laager. A detachment of Boers was also observed moving in an easterly direction along the north bank of the river, their intention probably being to ascertain our strength, but they were easily driven off by a squadron and a few guns on the right bank, working in conjunction with some mounted infantry and two guns on the south bank. At four o'clock on the 14th the baggage, under Colonel Porter's escort, at last made its way into camp, and preparations were now begun for the final dash into Kimberley.

The question of supplies was a difficult one. Many of the regiments having no corn-bags, wallets and nose-bags had to be stuffed full of grain, and sacks of oats were loaded on any spare horses available. Few, however, of these animals accomplished the journey to Kimberley, and most of the corn had to be abandoned on the veldt. The gun-horses were also in a pitiable state, and efficient teams had to be made up from some of the wagons, which had consequently to be left behind at the river. In the dim light of the 14th, the last night on which Kimberley was to remain invested, the advanced troops of General Kelly-Kenny's infantry division began to arrive at the Modder, thus setting free the cavalry to carry out their mission.

At half-past nine in the morning all was ready for one of the most daring feats the cavalry had been called upon to perform in the course of the campaign.

In column of brigade masses they marched out in the following order: 3rd brigade, Colonel Gordon (less one regiment as advanced guard); 1st brigade, Colonel Porter; 2nd brigade, Colonel Broadwood; mounted infantry. Still resorting to the idea of misleading the Boers, the column had made about three miles north-east in the direction of Bloemfontein, when suddenly the advanced guard was held up by a hot fire in front coming from a low ridge stretching towards a south-west bend of the river, while some guns simultaneously opened on us from a hill to the north-west, pitching their shells close to General French and his Staff. The Boers' position was now unmasked. They had cleverly placed themselves to block the road to Bloemfontein on the right, prevented us on the north-west from working round the flank and rear of Magersfontein, and left the way to Kimberley exposed to the cross-fire between their left and right positions.

Colonel Gordon had to make his dispositions rapidly under this severe fire. Holding the enemy in front he pushed a squadron out to the river to prevent the enemy, covered by the thick clumps of sheltering bush, from working round to enfilade us, while he sent Colonel Eustace with 12 guns out into the open to deliver a fierce attack on the crested hill which the Boers occupied above the river. Meanwhile Colonel Porter got his 18 guns into position, and, from the extreme end of a row of hills covering our camp at the river, shelled the position to the north-west. The Boers replied, and getting the range with wonderful accuracy, hurled shell after shell at our batteries. Our men stood their ground splendidly, though they might well have been swept off the hill, losing one officer and 12 men. Evidently the enemy had still failed to gauge our real intention.

Our column was heading towards a rising plain two miles and a half wide separating a ridge, running from north to south on the right, from a hill lying on the left. The Boers held both ridge and hill, the ridge with skirmishers, the hill with two guns, and extended themselves in a semicircle over the plain. There was no time to hesitate; Gordon's left and front were already under a hot fire, and if Kimberley were not reached that night, the horses, unwatered, must inevitably give way.

Every man looked to the General and eagerly awaited his decision. With the enemy fronting him, and flanked also on left and right, the dash on Kimberley must, according to all military rules, be a course of sheer madness. But the moment had come and the man. Confident that they believed themselves absolutely secure from a frontal attack, in that security French saw his opportunity, and, in a climax of daring, decided to charge across the plain right through the enemy's position.

Straightway, without breath or pause, Gordon with the 9th and 16th Lancers was sent due north, the guns remaining to keep down the Boer fire on the east line of ridge. Porter, continuing to engage the enemy on the left, acted as reserve and brought up guns and vehicles, supported by the mounted infantry. In two lines, with intervals of about five yards between the files, our men dashed forward and upward over the rising ground and disappeared into a cloud of dust.

A period of anxious suspense followed, and then out of the dust loomed up figures with an uncertain air about them; for one moment, hard pressed, they seemed to be faltering—coming back; but no, they were only deploying outwards towards the flanks.

Seeing this, the General himself, with the 2nd brigade, galloped on ahead in support of Gordon, already gone forward about 800 yards.

Our charge had been met by a withering fire from the open; but very soon the Boers, seeing their fire was not taking effect, and horse and steel bearing down upon them, sprang to their ponies and scattered into flight. Many made their escape through gaps in the charging lines of cavalry beyond the flanks, leaving 15 of their comrades upon the field; had Gordon been stronger, he could have held one squadron in close order, and prevented many of them from slipping through. Our casualties were astonishingly small. The cavalry, in their bold and successful charge, crossed the front of the Boer riflemen lining the ridge, our flanks actually coming within 1,200 yards of them, yet our losses were only four men wounded and two horses killed.

Never were the advocates of bold cavalry action more amply justified. The brigades assembled and reformed just north of Roodekalkfontein, and shortly before noon made a short halt at Abon's Dam to water. The scanty spring gave hardly sufficient for the men and water-carts, and the sorely tried horses had again to take up their weary way unrefreshed. Arranging for 200 mounted infantry to remain and guard the spring for the infantry, the cavalry pushed on, till six miles north of Abon's Dam a halt was again called to try to get into heliographic communication with Kimberley from a ridge by the road-side.

General French himself climbed the hill, and at once succeeded in establishing communication; but unfortunately the town, owing to some conflicting technicality for which the officer in command was not responsible, insisted on taking him for the enemy.

The General had to give up the attempt to make himself understood, and at half-past three, an hour later, decided to push on for the town, first detaching 200 mounted men to guard a water-windmill and a well.

Broadwood's brigade covering the division from the west, the other sections marched forward by Olifantsfontein. The Boers, with the view probably of getting safely away, reappeared and shelled our right, but our answering fire quickly silenced them, and soon after, their laager, with a depôt of supplies and ammunition, which we could see a few moments back in lively occupation, was evacuated in dismayed confusion and fell into our hands still warm from recent habitation. The Boers were making off towards Boshof in hasty retreat, but our horses were too exhausted to attempt pursuit This resistance disposed of, the road to Kimberley was now clear.

At six o'clock an officer came out from Kimberley to meet the General, and accompanied by two of our officers returned to arrange for bivouac and supplies for the night. General French and his Staff now rode on ahead of the column and entered the town from the east through Du Toit's Pan. Cheered again and again by the garrison and townspeople he rode to the Sanatorium, while a despatch by cable and flashlight conveyed to Klip Drift the joyful tidings that Kimberley had been relieved and that all was well with the garrison. Thus General French had carried out his promise made to Lord Kitchener at Modder River on the 9th, when he said, "I promise faithfully to relieve Kimberley at six on the evening of the 15th if I am alive." Characteristic of the energy and thoroughness of the man was his decision to cross their lines of communication at dawn next morning, while

pledging himself to watch closely and co-operate in any attack the Commander-in-Chief should wish to make on the enemy's positions.

Colonel Kekewich, the brave defender of Kimberley under conditions of exceptional responsibility and anxiety, conveyed the garrison's thanks to General French for all that he and his men had done.

The 1st and 3rd brigades bivouacked near Blankenberg's Vlei, while the 2nd brigade camped to the south of the town near Alexanderfontein. Late in the evening the following order was issued; "Troops to stand to, ready to march with guns, horses hooked in, at 5 a.m., to-morrow (16th February) and await orders."

It was important to press home our advantage promptly and vigorously before the Boers had time to rally from their discomfiture.

With a view to crossing the enemy's communication General French left Kimberley next morning at five o'clock, accompanied by Colonel Kekewich, who had with him several officers of the police and local corps to act as guides, taking an easterly direction, with Porter's brigade on the left, the mounted infantry in the centre, and Gordon on the right. When about eight miles from the town it was reported to the General by the Kimberley garrison force that they were holding a detachment of Boers on the north-west corner of the Dronfield ridge,—a bold log-shaped natural fortress which the enemy had occupied and entrenched to cover their retiring guns and accumulations during the siege—and he at once directed a combined movement against the enemy's communications and the Dronfield position. Gordon was ordered to make a wide easterly sweep so

as to close the Leeuwfontein-Boshof road, and head back a body of Boers who were trekking along it; he was then to pivot to the north-west upon the main body, who were moving northwards on his inner flank, towards the east end of the Dronfield ridge. At nine in the morning about 2,000 of the enemy were found strongly posted on the rising ground east of the railway, close to Macfarlane's siding. In this position they were covering a Boer laager and a large number of wagons which were waiting at Droogfontein, adjacent to the south bank of the Vaal, evidently intending to cross the stream by the loop in its course west of Riverton, whither a long convoy was also toilsomely wending its way by the north road, at a distance of from five to six miles.

A finer opportunity of effecting a magnificent capture from the enemy had never presented itself to General French, but all depended upon his horses being in a condition to serve him. The position at Macfarlane's had first to be cleared. Quick almost to a fault in his decisions, he at once directed Porter against the south and south-west of the enemy's position, with his face to the west. Thus holding the Dronfield ridge and the plain to the south of it, his left was to rest on Kenilworth, and, by extending his right to the north beyond Feelsted's homestead, he was to prevent the enemy from slipping away eastwards. Gordon's brigade, having encountered a good deal of opposition in their wide detour and now moving inwards towards the railway, were ordered to turn the north flank of the Macfarlane position. The mounted infantry, slipping in between and connecting on either flank with these two brigades, was to advance upon the enemy's centre.

The dispositions were well planned, but difficulties

and disappointments marred their effect. Gordon had scarcely begun his advance, in a somewhat echelon formation, when he encountered detachments of Boers thrown out south-east to check him, and, although he succeeded in driving them back, they retired upon and held a fair-sized ridge, east of Macfarlane's farm and parallel to his advance. The 9th Lancers endeavoured by a wide movement to turn the eastern extremity of this ridge, but a heavy rifle-fire compelled them to withdraw. Supported by the 16th Lancers, the attempt was gallantly renewed. A hot engagement ensued, in which the 9th Lancers lost Lieutenant Brassey killed, and Captain Gordon, Lieutenant Durand, and several non-commissioned officers and men wounded. The need for guns was urgent, but they had been driven to a standstill, had unlimbered, and were in action near the Boer centre. The General instantly perceived that the position could not be carried without reinforcements. He ordered the mounted infantry, now well forward, to dismount in readiness for pushing home the attack, so soon as Porter, for whom he was waiting, could engage the enemy's south flank; but heavy firing from the direction of the Dronfield ridge indicated that Porter was delayed. He, too, was hotly engaged, and in attempting to clear the ridge had become involved. Two dismounted squadrons of his brigade were sent forward in front of the batteries, and came into action against the enemy's entrenched position, which was ingeniously concealed. A third squadron of Inniskillings, under Major Allenby, was pushed out to turn the enemy's flank, towards which they crept up within 500 yards. A heavy bombardment and an encircling fire were maintained for over an hour, when the Boer reply slackened, and the

enemy were found to have withdrawn from their advanced position. Allenby and the three dismounted squadrons were left to hold the ridge, while Porter sent forward the Scots Greys and the remainder of his brigade to occupy a position on the south flank towards Macfarlane's. But General French had meanwhile decided to wait no longer, and delivering his attack, dislodged the enemy, and drove them before him in a westerly direction. Thus the Macfarlane position had been won.

The task now was to intercept the Boer retreat. For this purpose Colonel Pilcher had been working down to the Vaal beyond Riverton, with a detachment of mounted infantry, to take possession of that drift. The Boer laager and the moving convoy lay in full view, apparently an easy prey. It was only noon, and therefore not too late to follow up the advantage already gained. But Gordon, on being questioned as to whether a further movement was possible, replied that his horses were completely exhausted, and indeed in a half dying condition. This was not surprising. The day was trying in the extreme. Under the unflinching sun the sands threw up a heat that burned the air. The tongues of men and horses were black from thirst, many bodies went stiff from over-fatigue, and not a drop of water was anywhere to be had. Of the 68 horses left on the ground by Gordon's brigade, most died from sheer exhaustion. In these circumstances nothing more could be done, and as General French might at any moment be required by Lord Roberts, he decided to return to Kimberley and hold himself in readiness there.

Leaving the New Zealand Mounted Rifles and two guns to guard Macfarlane's farm and siding, he

concentrated on the way back to Kimberley an attack upon the enemy's laager at the west end of Dronfield ridge. The 1st brigade crossed the ridge to the south, while the 3rd brigade, followed by the main body, kept to the north and eventually worked south-west. The laager was heavily bombarded from two points, from the east and north, where the enemy were hemmed in by the 1st brigade, and from the south-west by the remainder of the division. Simultaneously the 1st brigade, which were now within 600 yards of the laager, poured into it a continuous volley-fire. The enemy, however, had securely entrenched themselves, and it soon became evident that they could not be put out of action without heavy loss. General French perceived that the utmost he could do was to hold them to their position, and, leaving the Kimberley garrison force to keep the enemy employed there, he withdrew his column of weary horsemen, and was back in the town by nine in the evening.

The advantage which the holding of entrenched positions affords in modern warfare was well illustrated by the success with which the enemy in this instance countered our attack. If it be true that there were not more than 200 Boers in occupation of the Dronfield ridge, their stubborn courage in holding on, with our cavalry moving round to cut off their retreat, was undoubtedly remarkable. Their tenacity may have been due to the idea that it would be safer to attempt escape under cover of darkness; at all events they did evacuate the ridge during the night. From the fact that one gun and everything in the laager was left behind, it would appear probable that they were really not sure of their whereabouts, and thought it best to make off with all speed so soon as they found retreat possible.

Our casualties for the day, brought in later by the ambulance train, were two officers killed, five officers and 22 men wounded.

There was apparently not a word of news from Headquarters, nor had the patrols, sent southwards, observed anything indicative of a movement by our main army. Detachments, however, left at the two wells between Modder River and Kimberley reported that a large body of Boers had left Magersfontein and moved eastwards on February 16th at dawn, and this movement was confirmed subsequently by Broadwood's patrols.

At eleven in the evening an officer came in with the news that Cronje was retreating eastwards, and that "General French was to move out with all possible despatch and intercept him." Orders, which had been issued for a reconnaissance the next morning, were at once cancelled, and Broadwood's brigade, which had done the least amount of work that day, was directed to move at three the next morning by the shortest route on Koedoesrand Drift, the most likely point at which to head off Cronje. With two squadrons of the Carabiniers the General decided to follow them an hour later, leaving one squadron behind to patrol and reconnoitre the country to the north-west and north of Kimberley. As a precautionary measure against the enemy, who, reported at Barkley, was causing some anxiety to the Kimberley people, he left the rest of the division, including Gordon's brigade, to protect the town until Lord Methuen's infantry should arrive. Another consideration in leaving behind the 1st and 3rd brigades was the condition of the horses. Many of them were totally unfit for work, and it was hoped that in the interval of at least a day they would be

rested, while it was also possible that the garrison and town of Kimberley might be able to furnish some remounts.

Colonel Porter was placed in temporary command of the troops and detachments in Kimberley, with orders to confer with Colonel Kekewich in the dispositions for future defence.

There is a marked difference in the operations culminating in the relief of Kimberley and those by which General French frustrated the attempts of the Boers to break through into Cape Colony. To the unprofessional mind there was nothing especially striking in the tactics by which the Boers had been pinned to their entrenchments at Colesberg; on the other hand nothing could be better calculated to fire the popular imagination than the swift and sudden dash by which he compelled Cronje to evacuate Magersfontein and brought relief to Kimberley. In the space of a few days General French became a popular figure. The public at home saw in him the triumphant British cavalry commander of tradition, sweeping all before him in the momentum of his advance. Yet how different was the reality! The sombre squadrons of riders with staggering and dying horses, the limitless stretch of sun-scorched veldt through which they moved, enveloped in clouds of swirling dust, the long trains of wagons crawling at their heels, and on the distant kopjes the lurking Boer! The difficulties and perils of this march could scarcely be over-estimated. Arrangements had to be made for feeding over 4,000 men and horses, who were marching to the relief of a beleaguered and ill-provisioned town through a bare and waterless country. A heavily-laden transport would have deprived the relieving

force of its mobility, and would have been an encumbrance rather than a help. The first condition of success lay in reducing transport to a minimum, and making it thoroughly mobile. The mule-transport organised had to be kept within the smallest limits, and several days' supplies carried by man and horse, which, although it increased the burden of the troop-horses, lessened the dependence of the division on the supply-column.

These arrangements completed, orders had to be issued for the concentration of the mounted troops in such a manner as not to arouse the suspicions of the enemy, and to mislead him by preparing for an operation entirely different from the one we intended to carry out. With this object Generals Macdonald and Babington were directed to make a feint at Koodoosberg, drawing Cronje's attention to the possibility of an attack on his right flank, and by assembling Hannay's mounted infantry and Porter's Carabiniers at Orange River station, Lord Roberts conveyed to Cronje the alternative possibility that he proposed to move on Bloemfontein by Faure-smith. Train-load after train-load of horsemen and artillery were deposited almost within gun-shot of the kopjes of Magersfontein. Confident that the British were anchored to the railway, and concluding that this accumulation of force on the Modder indicated another frontal attack, Cronje deepened his defences and prolonged them on either flank, and, according to Villebois waived aside the suggestion of a possible cavalry raid across his communications. He believed that in patrolling the drifts to the east he had taken ample precaution, and it was only at the last moment that he became uneasy. On February 10th he sent reinforcements from Jacobsdaal, who attempted to oppose our

passage at the Riet River, but were unable to offer any effective resistance. The news of what was afoot left Cronje unmoved, and it was not until two days later that the full import of the situation broke upon his mind.

And now as to the movements of the heavy infantry columns, which, following the cavalry step by step, set them free to push on to Kimberley, and finally cut the Boer communications with Bloemfontein.

The principle of the infantry advance was that as one column moved forward another should be ready to drop into its place; in this manner the advancing columns continually dovetailed into each other, and established a line of garrisoned positions. Thus when General French rode to Dekiel's Drift on the early morning of February 12th he was followed by the 7th division under General Tucker, while the 6th division under General Kelly-Kenny, which had been moved up by rail to Enslin and Graspan, replaced the 7th at Ramdam. On the following day the latter General pushed on to Waterval Drift with his division, and General Colvile brought up the 9th division to Ramdam. All this day the 7th division were passing their wagons across the Riet. On the 14th the cavalry reconnoitred from their camp on the Modder and waited for the 6th division, which moved down the Riet to Wegdraai Drift and, making a most trying forced march through the night, reached the cavalry camp at Klip Drift about two in the morning of the 15th. On the 14th the 7th division shifted their camp from Dekiel's Drift to Waterval Drift, where it was joined by the 9th marching from Ramdam. On the approach of the latter the 7th division moved down the Riet to Wegdraai Drift, where they were joined the following

day by General Colvile. Some of the 6th division entered Jacobsdaal on the 14th and found it unoccupied, but after a skirmish with the enemy fell back on their main body.

On the 16th a misfortune overtook the supply-column, with far-reaching results on the operations immediately following. As the column was crossing the drift at Waterval it was suddenly attacked by the enemy with rifle and artillery fire. Colonel Ridley, with 200 mounted infantry, in charge of the convoy, made a gallant fight, and on being reinforced succeeded in driving off the enemy. Eventually, however, the transport had to be abandoned altogether. Lord Roberts has placed on record the reasons which influenced him in this course.

On the 16th Lord Roberts established his head-quarters at Jacobsdaal, which had been occupied on the morning of that day with slight opposition by General Wavell's brigade of the 7th division, and it was here, by the way, that the City Imperial Volunteers came under fire for the first time. About noon the news of Cronje's flight from Magersfontein reached the Commander-in-Chief, who at once took energetic measures to close with him.

General French's handling of his division near Rooidam on February 13th was a signal instance of his skill as a cavalry leader. Though at this time the horses were suffering severely from the heat and the want of water, the General did not hesitate to alter his course and push the Boers eastward, his object being to transfer their attack from our vulnerable flank to our front, and to deceive them at the same time as to our true objective. This manœuvre demanded not only skill but considerable courage, and it was fully justified in the result. Similar audacity

marked the General's tactics on the 15th. The enemy felt assured that their skilful dispositions would effectually bar the road to Kimberley. They occupied the rising ground on either hand with riflemen and guns, and strewed their sharpshooters along the edge of the plateau across which lay the road to Kimberley, believing that he would not venture into this fire-swept zone; but to their discomfiture they had to learn the force of cavalry in shock tactics. Our dash through their lines under a cross fire of Mausers at a speed impaired by the condition of the horses must, in the light of modern warfare, be counted among the boldest and most hazardous achievements of European cavalry, worthy to rank side by side with some of the famous charges which have gone to make history. Many a commander might well have preferred to commit himself to a slow and cautious engagement; but General French had given his word that Kimberly should be relieved that day, and he knew that he had with him men who would exult in sharing an issue which was as desperate as it was brilliant.

The strategical soundness of Lord Roberts's plans for the relief of Kimberley has been questioned. It has been suggested that General French should have stayed on the Modder, resting his horses, and blocking Cronje's line of retreat to Bloemfontein with a force more mobile than the infantry who relieved him. Had he stayed on the Modder the primary object,—the relief of Kimberley—would not have been attained immediately. The possibility would still have remained of the garrison succumbing to an assault; a *coup de main* at the last moment, and a delay on the 15th, would have given Cronje ample time to withdraw the whole of his force by Riverton

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1. A BLOCK OF TRANSPORT IN WATERVAL DRIFT AT THE RIET RIVER.

2. ESCORT TO A CONVOY NEAR THE RIET RIVER.

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1. THE ADVANCED GUARD OF GENERAL FRENCH'S FORCE APPROACHING KIMBERLEY—THE FIRST GREETING WITH THE GARRISON WITHOUT THE TOWN.

2. GENERAL FRENCH IN THE MAGALIESBERG MOUNTAINS—A MIDDAY HALT.

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and Fourteen Streams to Boshof, where he would have been favourably placed for operating against our flanks and communications in any subsequent move on Bloemfontein. The cavalry had either to remain at Klip Drift or push on to Kimberley, as the question of water-supply was one of pressing importance, for, the Modder once left behind, there was no water for the horses nearer than Kimberley. These considerations made it impossible to take up a position astride of Cronje's line of retreat and prevent his escape to the east; and although the relief of the garrison was the main consideration, the move on Kimberley was from first to last a flank movement round Cronje's position.

General French, as we have seen, followed this course, which was dictated by the Commander-in-Chief's fine appreciation of the strategical and moral situation.

CHAPTER IV

PAARDEBERG

THE operations which resulted in the relief of Kimberley created a military situation of the deepest interest, and one calculated to exact the highest demands from the generalship of British and Boer commanders alike. For Cronje the problem was how to escape from the toils that were fast spreading around him, and for Lord Kitchener and General French the task was to capture or destroy the powerful forces under Cronje's command. The latter was prompt to realise the danger of his position, and lost no time in deciding upon the nature of the effort he should make to save himself. Immediately on the relief of Kimberley, February 15th, he determined on a bold attempt to break through the converging British columns. His big guns were despatched to the west, thence escaping north across the Vaal, and he himself made a hasty dash eastwards. The movement was miraculously well-timed. A rush of 30 miles took him across the plain that stretches down to the Modder River at Klip Drift. So closely did he cross the track of the cavalry in their march to Kimberley, that their slightest traces were still fresh and undisturbed upon the open sandy veldt.

Lord Kitchener and the infantry were concentrating at Klip Drift, and by good fortune his outposts marked

the mass of horsemen and wagons hastening past their front a little to the north. At once he sent the mounted infantry by the south bank of the river to seize Klipkraal Drift, the next passage beyond Klip Drift, and himself with his infantry hurried off in pursuit of the flying Boers; at the same time a messenger was despatched to General French, just returned from his indecisive action at Dronfield. Lord Kitchener was soon close enough to harass their retreat, but though Cronje paused to fire hot volleys back, the Boers were hourly gaining headway. They suffered so little delay that by nightfall of the 16th they were well ahead of our column, on the north bank of the Modder River. If there be one form of fighting more than another in which the Boers excel, it is rearguard tactics, and it became evident that, unless Cronje was headed, his pursuers would be shaken off. Klipkraal Drift being blocked, there were three drifts farther on,—Paardeberg, seven miles distant, Koedoesrand, 15 miles, and Makauw's five miles still farther north—any one of which would assure Cronje the road to Bloemfontein and safety. In electing to make for Koedoesrand, he made the wisest choice that was open to him in the circumstances as he understood them. He could not know that a powerful body of men other than that with which Lord Kitchener was pressing his rear, and under a leader who had already left his mark deeply on the Boers, was racing him from a totally different direction, with that same crossing for his goal. He never dreamed that General French could hear of his flight until it was too late, and regarded Lord Kitchener as his only danger.

The grasp which General French had obtained of the situation was, however, preparing for Cronje a surprise which would upset all his cleverest calcula-

tions. Cronje knew that it was the cavalry that had relieved Kimberley and was now operating north, and he believed that it was their intention to intercept him in that direction; it was doubtless with this knowledge that he had refrained from moving round the west and north of Kimberley, as he inferred that he had been expected to do, and had deliberately chosen the more daring course of marching directly eastward between the British columns. Meanwhile General French was actively arranging to push his horsemen forward to the north, west, and south-west, to clear up a situation that had so far perplexed him, and in which he had accomplished results near Dronfield that fell far short of satisfying him. Lord Kitchener's directions made the whole position clear, and he at once divined how events would work out. It was one of those critical moments in which the born military commander shows his quickness of apprehension and his boldness in action. At the very moment when Cronje felt confident that the leader of the cavalry was engaged on a fruitless enterprise to the north of Kimberley, that officer, with a reduced force of 1200 men, with such horses as he had fit for work, was making the best of his way on a diagonal line for Koedoesrand Drift, and reached it before his antagonist, the intent and desperate Cronje, could arrive.

In view of the many efforts made to capture De Wet, and the success with which he repeatedly outmanœuvred and evaded various combinations of pursuing generals, it is interesting to note how our deductions were drawn and the design of the enemy anticipated to a nicety. So soon as the news came through that Cronje was making eastwards, his object was guessed to be to reach Bloemfontein and get upon the railways. The river ran parallel with the

first part of the route, and offered a choice of three drifts. Paardeberg he would sight first, but Lord Kitchener might be near; Makauw was too far north; Koedoesrand, the central crossing, lay, by the eastward bend of the river, closest to Bloemfontein and furthest and best protected from the tactics of his pursuers. General French knew at what time Cronje had passed certain detachments left to guard the wells between the Modder River and Kimberley, as well as the position of the Boer rearguard when Lord Kitchener sent off his message, and thus, by taking the average pace of a convoy and by estimating the probable distance likely to be covered by noon of the next day, he was able to estimate the approximate position of the enemy.

While the main body proceeded without delay on Koedoesrand Drift, General French decided to detach a patrol southwards to the hills overlooking the Modder valley in the direction of Paardeberg and further west, and also towards Koedoesrand Drift to get in touch with the enemy. The moment the position of the head of Cronje's convoy was located, the cavalry was to be directed straight upon it. In this manner Cronje would be arrested in his flight before reaching Koedoesrand Drift, and the reasoning proving mathematically correct, General French succeeded in heading him off exactly according to his calculations.

General French knew that a swift and trying march was before him, and that it would be better to have a few mounts selected from the freshest of his force than a numerous body that might fail in the necessary degree of stamina and mobility. Broadwood's brigade and the Carabiniers, from their period of comparative rest on the 16th, seemed marked out for

the duty, and orders were accordingly issued for them to march at once to Koedoesrand Drift. One squadron of the Carabiniers was detached to carry out a reconnaissance to the north-west, and the remainder of the division was to follow in the pursuit so soon as Lord Methuen had entered Kimberley.

At three in the morning of February 17th the little force left Kimberley.[1] A short cut was taken, by Susanna and Boshvarkfontein, towards Kameelfontein, where they were to meet General French and his Staff who were following the main road with two squadrons of the Carabiniers, about 200 officers and men. At nine o'clock patrols reported dust-clouds to the south, moving eastwards along the line of the Modder, but it was impossible to say whether these were caused by the enemy or by our pursuing columns. Regardless as to which it might prove to be, the cavalry moved on; in either case it was clearly important that they should get still further to the east in order to intercept Cronje, if Cronje it were, or in the event of the Boer General's forced march having proceeded a point nearer to Bloemfontein, to strike him on the flank and delay his retirement until the arrival of the pursuing infantry.

Crossing the nek of the Kameelfontein ridge, near the farm of that name, a high square block of rough country, known as the Koedoesrand, was reached at a quarter past ten. Here some 20 Boers, mostly signallers belonging to Cronje's army, were captured. From them it was ascertained that Cronje and the whole of his force, with a large wagon-train three

[1] *Colonel Broadwood's Brigade:* Household Cavalry, 27 officers and 371 men; 10th Hussars, 23 officers and 321 men; 12th Lancers, 19 officers and 258 men. Total strength, 1,019 of all ranks.
Colonel Davidson's Brigade of Royal Horse-Artillery: 12 guns.

miles in length, were slowly moving eastward along the north bank of the Modder, and even now, seemingly unconscious of the presence of the British cavalry, were approaching the drift over the river which lay just below the ridge of the Koedoesrand.

The sudden onrush of our cavalry, whose proximity had not for a moment been suspected by the enemy, must have acted like a thunderbolt upon Cronje and his men; it was an emergency which they had neither anticipated nor prepared for. On the previous evening General French had been fighting the Boers 12 miles north of Kimberley; he was now at Koedoesrand Drift, having that morning covered a distance of 35 miles. It was one of the finest examples of military spirit that have been displayed in the whole course of the war.

One portion of his allotted task had been accomplished. He had reached the river before the enemy had succeeded in crossing; but would he be able to hold them there for the many hours which must elapse before the reinforcements could arrive? The situation was sufficiently critical. Cronje was supposed to have at his disposal some 6,000 men and several field-guns, while our leader could not at most dispose of more than 1,200 mounted men and two batteries of horse-artillery. The actual position of Lord Kitchener, and the events of the last two days near Klip Drift, were only vaguely known. General French would have considered that his rapid march from Kimberley had achieved but a very partial success in the event of Cronje being able to push past him, even if, in doing so, he was compelled to abandon his wagons and guns. With his characteristic rapidity of decision and resolute audacity, the British General made bold to venture an attack upon Cronje while the enemy were

still spell-bound with surprise, and before his own relative weakness could be discovered.

South-west of Kameelfontein a stretch of some 10 miles of open flat, extending to the river at Paardeberg, is bounded on the north by a semi-circular range of hills connecting Paardeberg and Koedoesrand Drift. The head of the Boer convoy was descried about six miles from the central height of this semicircle and near the river-bank. The small British force moved straight forward towards the drift, which lay about three miles south-east of the Kameelfontein farm-house, General French having at once sent Broadwood's brigade with their guns south and detached two squadrons to cover his front and flanks. As the advanced parties topped the rise of the low swell of country, about 1,800 yards from the river-bank, the scene was dramatic in the last degree. There in full view lay the unsuspecting enemy and the coveted prize. The leading wagons were just nearing the drift when our horse-artillery opened fire from the ridges. The first gun came into action at a quarter to eleven and the Boer army halted dead in its tracks on the instant. The surprise was complete; the wagons were out-spanned where they stood and the teams hurried into the river-bed.

Meanwhile General French had pushed forward two squadrons of the 12th Lancers, with a battery of horse-artillery, to cover his left flank, to get in front of the enemy near a small white farm-house, and to seize a crossing east of the convoy and west of the chief drift, so as completely to block the Boers. After the first few minutes of alarm, it was evident that the enemy clearly recognised the peril of his position, and vigorous efforts were made to ascertain the strength of the force which thus dared to stop his way. Four

guns were brought up along the convoy, so as directly to face ours, to which within a few minutes they were making a vigorous reply. Although their aim was accurate enough they failed to do any damage, being clearly outmatched, and after 20 minutes firing they were either withdrawn or silenced.

A strong body of the enemy now moved from the western portion of the field with the view of seizing the lower spur of high ground on the right and right rear of our guns. A squadron of the 10th Hussars raced the Boers in the open which runs from the high ground down towards the river, and reached the position first. Later, a squadron of the Household Cavalry and a battery of horse-artillery were brought up to reinforce this important post, which they held throughout the day. Towards four in the afternoon, the fire near this post having slackened, the squadron of the 10th Hussars was pushed forward in a south-westerly direction to ascertain if the enemy were holding the river-bank in force. Six hundred yards from the river was a low embankment, and as the squadron moved forward well opened out, their right flank extending close to the river, they were met with a heavy rifle fire, which compelled them to fall back with considerable loss in men and horses. There could be no doubt that the river-bank was held, and probably was being entrenched.

About this time an independent Boer force, coming up from the south, was observed heading along the ridge which extends north-west of Koedoesrand Drift. This force had probably arrived from Stormberg or Colesberg, knowing that Cronje was in difficulties and would require assistance in his endeavours to escape. It opened fire from the Koedoesrand itself, and their shells began to fall near the Kameelfontein farm-house.

Their obvious intention was to work north round the semicircle of hills and surround that portion of our forces on the west which were holding Cronje's front; but their efforts were not successful, nor were they pushed with any vigour. A well-handled squadron of the 12th Lancers, which had been all day holding a position at Kameelfontein farm, and had been ultimately reinforced by a section of guns, was sufficient to keep them effectually in check.

Towards evening the fire slackened upon both sides. At six a cloud of dust to the west of Paardeberg was thought to indicate the approach of the mounted infantry, who were known to be following on Cronje's track. After dark, having failed to establish heliographic communication with Lord Kitchener, the General ordered a salvo to be fired from our guns, to indicate that we had headed off the enemy and were engaged with him. That night must have been one of intense anxiety to French, for he could not but realise that a bold attack by the enemy would expose his force to the danger of being swept away. If by the following morning the infantry had not come up, Cronje might perceive that he had nothing but a weak detachment opposed to him, and, aided by Boer forces from Bloemfontein, might by resolute fighting escape with a portion of his command.

The British squadrons bivouacked in the positions they had taken during the day, and were supplied with provisions obtained from neighbouring farmhouses, instead of the regular rations; for indeed neither rations for the men, nor forage for the horses, were dealt out from the army supplies for three consecutive days, but were carefully husbanded against any possible emergency.

Early next morning General French, who had

bivouacked with his Staff near Kameelfontein farm, rode in the darkness to our extreme right, which Colonel Broadwood held with the squadrons of the 10th Hussars and Household Cavalry, north of the Boers' laager, the point from which the hoped-for advance of the 6th division could first be seen. When the sun rose the Boers were found to have evacuated the western hills towards Paardeberg, but otherwise there did not appear to be any change in the situation.

A load of anxiety must have been removed from the General's mind. There lay the wagon-train, sullen and lifeless, where it had halted yesterday. Some slight movements could be seen in and along the river-bed, and many deserters rode swiftly out from the laager to escape from their friends and the fate which appeared inevitable. Cautiously they approached our posts, and with hands held up high over their heads proclaimed their desire to have done with war. Much information was to be obtained from them. One of them described vividly the alarm caused by our unexpected arrival on the previous day. Who were we? Where had we come from? From Kimberley? No; that was impossible. General French had gone north from Kimberley the day after the relief of the town. Yes, Cronje was in the laager, and all his men and guns, many thousands of men, and women. Mrs. Cronje was there too, and Cronje sat holding her hand and soothing her. Everything was in confusion,—and so on.

So soon as the light served, efforts were made to get into heliographic communication with the infantry force advancing from the west, in which direction artillery fire was heard at about half-past seven. After repeated attempts, our signals were caught up at the other end, and the General was at last enabled to

inform Lord Kitchener that he had headed off the enemy, had shelled him for 30 hours, preventing him from moving a single wagon, and that a Boer force from the south, occupying the hill north of Koedoesrand, was being held in check.

Hardly had this news been transmitted when General Kelly-Kenny urged that every possible endeavour should be made to prevent the Boers from escaping northward. Accordingly Lord Airlie was ordered to reconnoitre towards the ridge above Koedoesrand Drift, and by ten o'clock the centre of the ridge was occupied, the Boers still holding its southern extremity. This was all the change made in the cavalry dispositions that day.

Meanwhile the main army, four miles away, was passing through less eventful experiences. At eight on the morning of the 19th the infantry and the guns showed themselves, and a terrific fusilade was heard. It soon became known that Lord Kitchener had led a combined attack on Cronje's entrenched positions along the banks of the river, resulting in heavy losses (1,200 killed and wounded) to the Highland Brigade, the Canadians, Cornwalls, Shropshires, Oxfordshires and others, who had bravely crossed the open only to fall before the well-aimed bullet of the hidden Boer.

Later in the day instructions were received from Headquarters that the cavalry should cross over to the south bank of the river. It appeared to General French, however, that the withdrawal of the force from the north bank would have left Cronje an open line of retreat, and he took the responsibility of maintaining his dispositions as they were, until Colonel Gordon should have arrived from Kimberley. This would free Broadwood, who could then cross without the danger of allowing Cronje to escape. Colonel

Gordon's arrival on the next day enabled the transfer of Broadwood and the Carabiniers to the south bank, he leaving behind him, however, the Household Cavalry. By this arrangement the enveloping circle was completed, while the rest of the division hemmed in the Boer laager from the north and east, and prevented assistance from reaching Cronje.

Gordon and his brigade, who had been hourly expected the day before, at last arrived. He had left Kimberley early on February 18th, after receiving 107 remounts from the Cape Police and Kimberley Light Horse, with orders to join General French at Koedoesrand Ford. His force was composed of O. and R. batteries of horse-artillery, the 9th and 16th Lancers (780 of all ranks with 751 horses). By five in the evening he had approached the main Koedoesrand Drift, where he expected to come in touch with General French's force, when his advance was suddenly checked by a Vickers-Maxim, and he soon saw that the enemy, estimated later at 350, were holding the drift.

The situation was obviously one of some danger. Gordon had lost 17 horses by the way from exhaustion, and was now isolated with a small column and a reduced number of weak mounts. Nevertheless he attacked the position, succeeded in driving the enemy from the banks of the river, and seized the drift. Darkness was fast setting in, and the enemy continued to concentrate their fire on the drift, which had now passed into our hands. As a matter of precaution Gordon withdrew his guns to a farm to the north, supported by Roberts's Horse, and keeping the cavalry in advance.

Meanwhile General French, being anxious about Gordon, sent out a detachment of Rimington's Guides

early the next morning, to reconnoitre towards the Koedoesrand Drift. They were sent in that direction because on the previous afternoon a cloud of dust had been observed about five miles east of Kameelfontein, presumably indicating Gordon's horsemen. They succeeded in getting in touch, and, acting on the instructions they brought, Gordon immediately withdrew his force to Kameelfontein farm to join the main body.

The Boers were beginning to display greater activity below the south bank of the Modder to the east of the Koedoesrand Drift, and the situation in that direction required clearing up. Lord Roberts had arrived that day at Paardeberg from Jacobsdaal, and General French, after a consultation with him, obtained leave for his division and headquarters to be transferred from Kameelfontein to Koedoesrand Drift, their place to be taken by the mounted infantry and infantry, who could extend their lines so as to command the Boer laager north of the drift and Kameelfontein. A flash-light message was also sent to Porter to join the cavalry division with all details so soon as the first train from the south reached Kimberley.

Accordingly on the morning of February 20th General French transferred his headquarters to the drift and commenced a series of operations on the outer circle of the river, to check all movements of the enemy coming from the south and east, his object being to enable the main army to devote itself to pressing Cronje into surrender.

From far and wide the Boers hurried in to the rescue of Cronje, their people's mainstay and grim guardian, —"slim" Cronje, who would, they felt sure, discover how to extricate himself from any position and elude

any enemy. They took up a strong defensive position south of the river, stretching from Paardeberg in a south-easterly direction, with a view of facilitating and covering the retreat of Cronje and his men.

General French's first concern was firmly to secure the two drifts, Koedoesrand and Makauw, five miles further up-stream, to which end it was imperative that the line of kopjes running parallel one mile south should be occupied. Gordon was ordered to proceed south-east with R. battery, the 16th Lancers, and 150 men of Roberts's Horse. He detailed the Lancers to seize Makauw's Drift, and Roberts's Horse to seize Koedoesrand Drift. Both fords were successfully secured, and the occupation of Makauw's Drift signified the turning of the enemy's flank. The hills to the south were heavily bombarded, and Roberts's Horse were able to move out from Koedoesrand Drift and to slip into the positions relinquished by the Boers along the kopjes from east to west. One squadron of the 16th Lancers and two guns remained for the night posted at Makauw to hold the drift. The kopjes were held by outposts of Roberts's Horse, and the remainder of the brigade, including the 9th Lancers who had been engaged on detached duties during the day, bivouacked on the right bank of the river.

By these operations, in which only six men were wounded and five horses killed, General French had placed himself in a position to co-operate in an attack on the important isolated eminence known as Kitchener's Hill, so named from the fact that it had been occupied by some of Kitchener's Horse when the main army reached Paardeberg. The hill is situated some distance from the Modder, south-east of Paardeberg Drift, commanding the river-bank and a wide expanse of open country. Its importance had

been gauged by Cronje and those who had flocked to his rescue. The latter now held it in considerable force, and if left undisturbed Cronje's chance of breaking through our lines would be increased, while his retreat southward remained covered and practically assured. Lord Roberts, seeing that the enemy must be dislodged from this position, sent two battalions of infantry with artillery to operate from the direction of Paardeberg to the south of the hill, Broadwood at the same time being ordered to turn the hill from the west and south and join hands with General French, who was to co-operate from the Koedoesrand Drift, clearing on his way the intervening kopjes. His dispositions were as follows:—O. battery, with the 16th Lancers, one squadron of Kitchener's Horse, and 150 of Roberts's Horse were left to protect the drifts. The Household Cavalry, the 9th Lancers, and the rest of Roberts's Horse, with 12 guns, had orders to parade in masses immediately south of Koedoesrand Drift. The regiments turned out in greatly reduced numbers, the Household Cavalry (two squadrons), 9th Lancers, and Roberts's Horse, mustering only 268 sabres in all.

Setting out at daybreak on February 21st, General French took a due southerly direction for two miles. When within 2,500 yards of the most easterly hill of the enemy's position, our guns opened fire, whereupon the Boers fell back with haste on their next position, a ridge lying westwards. Here they were protected by a natural fortification of boulders, on which our guns were unable to make any impression, and General French accordingly moved off to take them in flank and join hands with Broadwood's brigade (10th Hussars and 12th Lancers) on the march from Paardeberg south towards Kitchener's Hill. Having established communications with Broadwood, who, with

General Kelly-Kenny, was bombarding Kitchener's Hill, he was resting his tired horses, when about 800 Boers came galloping out from the hill into the open.

Dismounting 800 yards from the cavalry they opened a heavy rifle fire, evidently thinking our reduced squadrons would be easy victims, and not knowing that our guns lay concealed behind them. But the guns, unlimbering in the long grass, opened at a range of about 1,200 yards, while the cavalry, dismounted to ease their exhausted horses, fired hot volleys into the foe. The Boers, checked in their advance, wheeled off and retired in the direction of the same easterly hill which we had bombarded earlier in the day. But this position was now too hot for them, and turning they fled in confusion across the plain under the bullets of the outposts held by Roberts's Horse. On they swept panic-stricken towards Makauw's Drift, where they were finally disorganised by the fire of two of our guns holding the drift from the north side.

Our cavalry must have chafed sorely at the knowledge that their horses were physically incapable of following the pursuit; but for all that they had done an excellent day's work, with their handful of men against from 2000 to 3000 of the enemy, and the results attained were of the highest importance. By the next morning the Boers had evacuated all their positions south of the river from Kitchener's Hill to Poplar Grove leaving 15 killed and 20 wounded on the field and as many prisoners. Our cavalry lost one man killed, Captain Campbell of the 9th Lancers, and a brother-officer, with four rank and file, were wounded. The success was nearly completed by the capture of General Botha; his cart was taken, and he only just saved himself by racing off on a pony.

General Porter, with the 1st brigade, arrived that morning at Koedoesrand Drift from Kimberley, being somewhat later than expected. General French had signified by flashlight that the arrival of the first train into Kimberley was to be the signal for Porter's departure for Koedoesrand. Some delay was occasioned through orders miscarrying, and although the first train arrived on the 19th it was only on Porter's going to meet the second train conveying Lord Methuen on the 20th that he received verbal orders from this commander to join General French, and not until early on the following morning was he informed of the exact direction he should take. All was ready for the march at five o'clock, but even then two hours' further delay occurred waiting on parade for the supplies to come up. A 14 hours' march brought him shortly after sunset to Kameelfontein, where he bivouacked for the night. Upon his arrival next morning at Koedoesrand, he was sent to clear the country north of the drift, Colonel de Lisle, who was at Kameelfontein with a detachment of mounted infantry, having reported that a considerable force of Boers had been sighted coming from the north; but Porter could find no sign of them.

The day was a trying one. Heavy thunderstorms broke over the camps, men and horses being exposed continuously to a deluge of rain which was driven before a boisterous wind; while from the direction of Paardeberg was heard unceasingly all the morning the sound of furious cannonading. When they left Klip Drift it was expected that the transport would be seen again in a few days, but from the 15th to the 23rd there was no sign of it. The effect of short rations was intensified by exposure during many nights to weather of exceptional inclemency. For a period of

11 days the men had been devoid of shelter, and had no other covering than their clothes.

At daybreak on Friday, February 23rd, a farm held by a squadron of the 9th Lancers under Captain Lund, abutting on the hill two miles south of Koedoesrand Drift, from which the enemy had been driven on February 21st, was attacked by a party of 400 Boers, and two squadrons of Porter's brigade were sent to their support.

Crossing the drift Porter sent out a reconnoitring detachment who found the enemy strongly posted on a line of ridge stretching four miles east and west to the south of the farm held by the 9th Lancers, which was opposite the enemy's centre. A frontal attack being inadvisable Porter decided to dislodge them by a flank movement. A battery came into action against the enemy's left, while a squadron of the Scots Greys was ordered round his left flank; the battery changing its direction, a squadron of the Carabiniers proceeded to turn the enemy's right flank, and a company of mounted infantry was pushed into the centre to the support of the Lancers. By means of the attack thus pressed, the Boers were in a couple of hours forced to withdraw from the hills, and were in full retreat. The battery and one squadron, advancing through the farm occupied by the Lancers, came into action on a hill a few miles further on. Beyond this point, it being impossible for the cavalry to follow up the pursuit, owing to the exhausted condition of their horses, further action was made over to the guns who shelled the enemy as they crossed the open. On the Boer side there had been several casualties, as was gathered from nine men taken prisoners; on our side there were none.

During the afternoon one of the squadrons returned

to camp, the company of mounted infantry being left with the Lancers. The privations endured by man and horse during that night were pitiful in the extreme. The animals, utterly tired out and shivering in the merciless rain and cold, could be allowed only a morsel of food to save them from dropping lifeless, their ration being limited to a single pound of oats for each horse. The provisions dealt out to their riders were on an equally meagre scale,—one biscuit and two spoonfuls of flour for each man.

General French now proceeded to concentrate his force for a continued movement eastward.[1] At this point some changes were made in his Staff. The Earl of Erroll had assumed the duties of Staff-Officer for mounted infantry at the Headquarters of the Army under Lord Roberts, and his place was taken by Major Douglas Haig, as Assistant Adjutant-General of the cavalry division. The appointment of Major Haig to this important post proved a particularly happy selection. In many respects an ideal staff-officer, a thorough disciplinarian with a cultured and highly-trained professional mind, and a well-

[1] The strength of the Division on February 24th was as follows :—

Royal Horse-Artillery. Three Brigade Divisions (1,173 men, 1,101 horses, and 42 guns).

Imperial Troops. Household Cavalry (378 men, 341 horses), Carabiniers (361 men, 317 horses, with two Maxims), Royal Scots Greys (304 men, 256 horses, with two Maxims), Inniskillings (36 men, 31 horses), 9th Lancers (181 men, 153 horses), 10th Hussars (344 men, 300 horses), 12th Lancers (277 men, 221 horses), 14th Hussars (115 men, 94 horses), 16th Lancers (301 men, 307 horses), Mounted Infantry (406 men, 428 horses, with two Maxims).

Colonial Troops. New South Wales Lancers (91 men, 99 horses), Queensland Mounted Infantry (107 men, 110 horses), New Zealand Mounted Rifles (74 men, 80 horses), Roberts's Horse (382 men, 383 horses).

Total strength, 4,530 of all ranks, 4,221 horses, 42 guns, and six Maxims.

developed faculty for organisation, he possessed a cool judgment and a power of self-control, was calm in action, and withal a most dashing cavalry officer. By the exercise of these qualities he had already rendered distinguished service on the Natal side and during the operations round Colesberg.

Soaking rain combined to make matters exceedingly unpleasant for the men in camp and on outpost duty, but General French riding round the lines found their spirits nothing abated. They were cheered by the message from her Majesty Queen Victoria, reproduced in orders, expressing high appreciation of the excellent work done by them, especially in the relief of Kimberley, which had earned them, they were told, the gratitude of the whole nation.[1]

Next day General French rode out early to the hill above the drift to scan the country to the south for any signs of Boer activity, but the landscape was shrouded with wet and fog and no outlook was possible.

On the night of February 26th it was expected that Cronje, who had been bombarded mercilessly for several days by a surrounding force of 35,000 men and 40 big and small guns, would make an attempt to break through the cordon of infantry. The troops suffered severely from the almost impassable river, but they were as cheery as ever when they turned out, late in the evening, to hold a line between Kameelfontein on the north bank and Osfontein on the south. The line of the cavalry extended from the river to the mounted infantry pickets at Kameelfontein, where

[1] The reply of General French to the royal message was in the following terms: "The Cavalry Division received your Most Gracious Majesty's message with pride and enthusiasm. On their behalf General French asks leave to express their grateful thanks for your Majesty's recognition of their services."

two squadrons of the 1st brigade supported Colonel Henry's men; two squadrons with guns formed a reserve at the nek north of Koedoesrand Ridge, and two squadrons of the 16th Lancers reinforced the cordon round Cronje's laager from the Lincoln Post to Kitchener's Hill.

The troops remained on the alert throughout the night. All was quiet until about three in the morning, when Cronje sounded his last reveille and poured a heavy fusilade into the waiting stillness of the night. A few hours later the news was flashed across to General French that the Boer General had surrendered unconditionally to Lord Roberts. A great result had been achieved, and the Boer cause struck hard. This surrender, with its broad outcome of effect, marked the turning-point in a campaign hitherto full of vicissitudes and uncertainty. All the troops engaged had contributed their share to the result, but General French and his division it was that, seizing the occasion, forced success from a dubious outlook. Cronje, in his flight, found the tables turned on him, and the men whom he had believed his pursuers fronting him full face on the Modder bank. Thus, by a rapid and skilful manœuvre, the cavalry from far back at Kimberley had stayed and trapped him for the oncoming British forces, while at the same time French on his further side kept the would-be rescuers at bay. History will mete to the English cavalry leader high award for his share in the great capture at Paardeberg.

That same afternoon, Tuesday, February 27th, it was reported to General French that Colonel Le Gallais had located a strong Boer force south of the river, which was holding a hill to the east. The cavalry division was at once ordered out, and accom-

panied by his Staff the General set out to cross the flooded Modder and reconnoitre the position. The river was running very high, and just as the General and Colonel Haig were entering the water, an angry current surged in and carried their horses down stream. Happily they righted themselves before any serious damage was done, but not before General French's charger had thrown him in midstream. Beyond this untoward incident the onward movement was not delayed.

The hill reported as held by the mounted infantry was ascertained to be the left of the enemy's position at Poplar Grove, already familiar to French, and known to be occupied by De Wet and Delarey. Fearing that an attack might disclose our future plans, the General decided to do nothing that day; and though, on his return to camp long after dark, he busied himself in pushing forward arrangements for delivering the attack, his views as to its inadvisability decided Lord Roberts to countermand his previous instructions.

The operations of the cavalry on the 21st and subsequent days entirely cleared the country between Koedoesrand Drift and Paardeberg from the Boers that had swarmed into the relief of Cronje. Reconnoitring patrols reported them to be concentrating at Poplar Grove, and between March 1st and March 6th the cavalry were engaged, in the face of violent thunderstorms and constant rain, in clearing the neighbourhood of Makauw's Drift.

On Thursday, March 1st, from a low outpost hill two miles north of Makauw's Drift, General French observed the enemy to be fortifying their position near Poplar Grove, putting up stone walls, digging trenches, etc. On the following morning emplacements for five guns were discovered, and late in the afternoon the

General, riding with Colonel Haig along the north bank of the river, observed about 1,500 Boers, with led ponies and from 20 to 30 wagons, on the further bank, moving northwards from Poplar Grove. Either they were retreating northward, or, what was more likely, advancing to a position north of the river-bank to prevent us from working round their flank from the north.

As a heavy rain obscured all means of observation, at six in the evening an officer's patrol was sent out, followed an hour later by a contact squadron under Major Scobell, who remained out overnight to ensure touch with the enemy. The patrol on its return reported the convoy to be still on the move with two searchlight wagons. It was one more of those tempestuous nights bringing wakeful and wearing discomfort and keeping men on the strain for the approach of day and the relief of active operations.

Early in the morning of Saturday, March 3rd, Porter's brigade, accompanied by General French, marched out from Makauw's Drift to ascertain the enemy's exact object, and, if possible, capture the convoy. They were found holding a flat-topped hill north-west of Poplar Grove, known as Leeuwkop, and a hill two miles north-west of Kanonfontein, both on the north bank. On both these hills elaborate breastworks had been thrown up.

Finding Scobell engaged with the enemy near Leeuwkop, Porter sent one squadron to outflank their skirmishers and engaged parties of Boers who were riding across to the Kanonfontein hill. In order to cover them the enemy opened on our squadrons with a nine-pounder from Leeuwkop. An officer's patrol was opportunely slipped in behind the detached body of Boers between Leeuwkop and Kanonfontein, and by

this artful move the enemy's laagers were located behind the hlils. This valuable information was promptly turned to account by Alderson's mounted infantry and one squadron of cavalry with four guns being sent northward. The Boers, as it happened, had anticipated him by extending their front along a line of kopjes covering their laagers. This movement drew the fire of a Krupp gun and pom-pom, and thus revealed with exactitude the extent and location of the enemy.

Alderson failed to get round the enemy's right, but having fully attained the purpose of the reconnaissance, the brigade was skilfully withdrawn, and was back in camp shortly after noon. On the following day two squadrons again reconnoitred the north bank of the river, and found the enemy in the same position, no change being discovered except that a number of tents had been added to the laager, indicating their confident intention to maintain the position. Major Allenby's squadron remained out for the purpose of contact, and the other withdrew to camp.

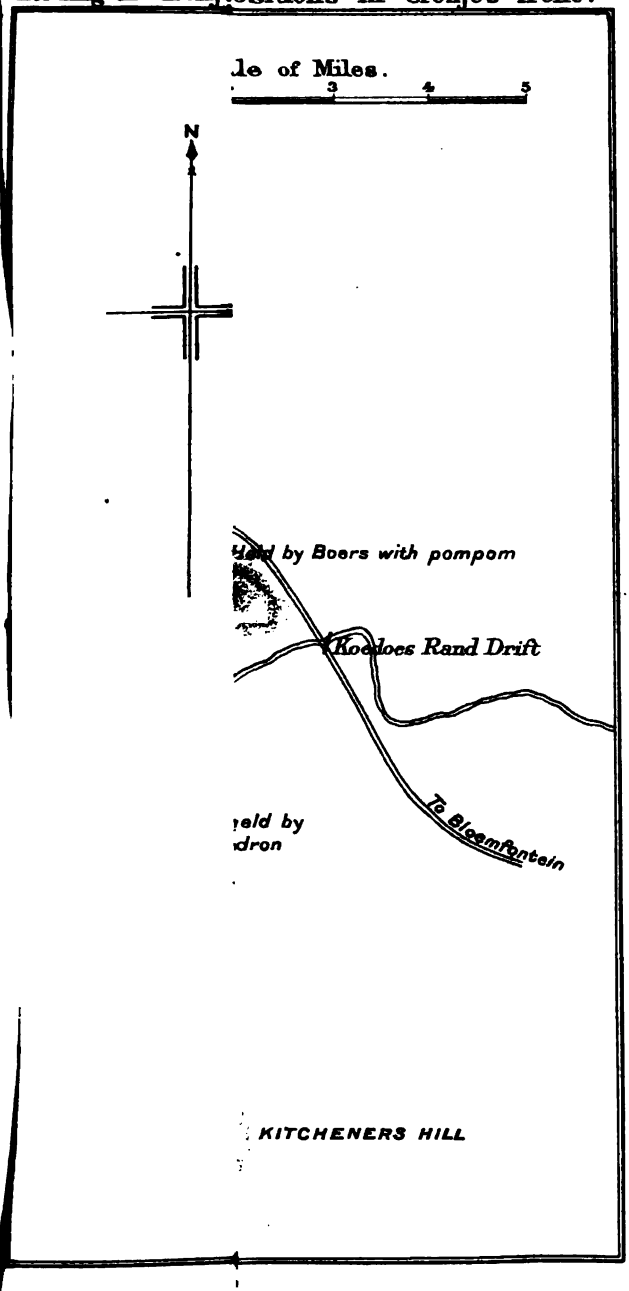
On March 6th Lord Roberts, accompanied by General French, examined the Boer positions from a hill north of Makauw, and arranged that all the cavalry outposts should be withdrawn, for a concentration in strength on the south bank of the river.

Two companies of Colonel Alderson's and Colonel Henry's mounted infantry were attached to the Highland Brigade and took over the advanced outposts, while the Highlanders were sent to occupy the outpost hill north of the river, at Makauw's Drift. From six in the morning onwards, during torrents of rain, the artillery crossed by pontoon ferry to the south bank of the Modder, and the 1st brigade, with much difficulty owing to the flooded conditions of the river, crossed by regiments at intervals of half an hour.

By ten o'clock the whole division was concentrated on Koedoesrand Drift, and from there were ordered to Osfontein, to give them plenty of room to manœuvre wide of the enemy's positions at Poplar Grove, when carrying out the contemplated sweeping movement south-east. They arrived at five in the afternoon, and proceeded to bivouac in columns of brigade masses, facing south, with the guns in the rear, ready to march out at dark.

GEN[th] February, 1900.

heading of Cronje's positions in Cronje's front.



GENERAL FRENCH'S MARCH FROM KIMBERLEY TO BLOEMFONTEIN.

1, 2. CRONJE'S CONVOY, AS HELD UP BY GENERAL FRENCH BY THE MODDER RIVER.

3. DRIFT BY PAARDEBERG INTO WHICH CRONJE DROVE HIS CATTLE.

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1 AND 2. SCENES IN CRONJE'S LAAGER AFTER HIS SURRENDER.

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1. CAVALRY COLUMN IN PROGRESS.

2. SCENE AT PAARDEBERG AFTER CRONJE'S SURRENDER.

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GENERAL FRENCH'S MARCH FROM KIMBERLEY TO BLOEMFONTEIN.

1. WATERING HORSES ON THE BANKS OF THE MODDER RIVER AT KOEDOESRAND DRIFT.

2. THE PONTOON BOATS ON THE MODDER RIVER AT KOEDOESRAND DRIFT.

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GENERAL FRENCH'S MARCH FROM KIMBERLEY TO KOEDOESRAND DRIFT.

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1. IN THE BED OF THE MODDER RIVER BY THE SCENE OF CRONJE'S SURRENDER.

2. PONTOON BOATS ON THE MODDER RIVER.

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CHAPTER V

POPLAR GROVE

THE concentration of so large a force of Boers at Poplar Grove appeared to Lord Roberts the opportunity of striking one grand blow, while the enemy was still stunned by the shock of the surrender at Paardeberg, which should shake their *moral*, break up their cohesion, and dishearten them to such an extent as to hasten an early collapse of their resistence. The day on which he hoped to compel them to this supreme conflict was March 7th.

He had thoroughly reconnoitred the ground round Poplar Grove, hoping that the Boers would seriously venture to take up the gage of battle, and confident that if they did the results would be as conclusive in our favour as was the surrender at Paardeberg.

The commandos which had flocked to the rescue of Cronje had been swept eastwards before him, but were now massed in a position of their own choice, a position undoubtedly affording them strong defensive advantages, and likewise giving, what the Boers were always careful to provide, a line of retreat which could be easily safeguarded.

Their elaborate preparations seemed to indicate that Lord Roberts's wishes were to be gratified. They had deliberately thrown out a front 10 miles in extent between the Kanonfontein hills, north of the river, and

the southern extremity of the Seven Kopjes. Such an extended front they might naturally suppose incapable of being turned, and by a stubborn defence of the position they might hope to somewhat retrieve their recent ill fortunes; at the worst, they could either retire north-eastwards under cover of the Leeuwkop hill or fall back on Abraham's Kraal.

They doubtless considered it essential to delay Lord Roberts's advance to Bloemfontein, if it could not altogether be frustrated. This would enable them to gain time, and allow their retiring columns from the south-west to concentrate and make for points of safety; in any case, by taking the fullest advantage of the position at Poplar Grove, they could reckon on adding materially to the difficulty and cost of our onward rush to the Free State capital. They must have relied on the chances of inflicting such destructive blows on our over-daring troops as had presented themselves to Cronje at Magersfontein; and that consideration alone was of sufficient reason for making a stand at Poplar Grove against such a formidable array of force as Lord Roberts had assembled there.

To prevent our working round their flanks they had thrown their front well across the river. Schantzes and gun-epaulments were thrown up on the kopjes; trenches were cunningly dug for distances parallel to the Modder in the hope that, following the course of the river, we should find ourselves well between their strongly occupied ridge at Poplar Grove and the riparian entrenchments, and that a rude awakening would be ours while we were unconsciously moving between them. Ingenious traps were contrived and laid in positions likely for us to blunder into. Their extraordinary capacity for hitting upon tactical points, which had been so unerringly illustrated in Natal, once

more came to their aid. Leeuwkop, north of the river, covered a useful line of retirement, and was consequently made one of the salient features of their dispositions. Its importance we had practically admitted by our many reconnaissances, and the enemy had benefited from our observations. At an earlier stage it might have been ours for the taking, but now the enemy relied upon it for their stand, and for their retreat should retreat be necessary.

Lord Roberts, on his part, was acutely conscious, as his dispositions showed, that complete success depended on our getting possession of the Leeuwkop hill. It was clear that what he planned was to lure or coerce the Boers into a pitched battle, in which fugitive commandos would be held up by columns of cavalry and mounted men forestalling them at the drifts and other important points of retreat. The plan, as a whole, was excellently conceived and ought to have proved completely successful, had the assumptions, perhaps justifiable, not been wrong. Contrary to expectation we were not only unable to make the Boers give battle, but they contrived to effect their retreat carrying with them all their guns and a large portion of their transport.

Although Lord Roberts's plan for the envelopment and surrender of the Boers failed of accomplishment, they on the other hand were foiled in their efforts to inveigle us into the heart of their commandos.

On March 1st, 1900, the Boer position near Poplar Grove was as shown in the accompanying sketch. Practically the whole force was located on the chain of hills south of the Modder River. The headquarters of our cavalry division was at Koedoesrand Drift, about two miles west of Makauw's Drift, the division itself being on both banks of the river. On

the north bank the advanced posts were, as shown above, about two miles east of Makauw's Drift, and from thence the ground to the east as far as the high hills north of Poplar Grove was open and undulating. From the post marked A. an excellent view could be got of the whole Boer position south of the river. Between the river and the enemy's position on the hills south of it, the ground is open and undulating. The river banks are slightly wooded, very steep, and fordable only at Poplar Grove Drift, within the enemy's lines. Up to March 2nd, (Friday) although the enemy had patrols on the northern bank, there was no considerable force there and a flat-topped hill marked B. was practically unoccupied. North of this hill again the ground was hilly and broken. On March 2nd a decided movement of the enemy to the north bank was observed, and on the following day a reconnaissance in force was made by Porter's brigade and Alderson's mounted infantry, at which General French and Staff were present. From this it was clear that Leeuwkop Hill (hill B.) was strongly held by a force of from 4,000 to 5,000 men, with two guns. The rough ground to the north of Leeuwkop also held considerable parties of the enemy. On Sunday the 4th, when reporting to the Director of Military Intelligence at Osfontein, Major Lawrence of the 17th Lancers, who had thoroughly examined and reconnoitered the position, described the situation to Lord Roberts, and pointed out that the occupation of Leeuwkop Hill gave the enemy the power of retiring by the northern bank across Poplar Grove Drift, if our attack was delivered along the southern bank only against the main position. Major Lawrence was directed to show General Marshall any possible artillery positions on the north bank near the outposts,

whence an attack on Leeuwkop Hill and the drift could be initiated, and further to reconnoitre to the south of the position on the south bank with a view to guiding the cavalry division during the night round the Boer's left flank to a point on the river east of their position. The Commander-in-Chief wished the cavalry to leave at such a time as to be on the river in the rear of the enemy by daylight, Burnham being instructed to give Major Lawrence any assistance he required. On the 4th, and again on the 6th, Burnham and Major Lawrence examined the ground to the south of the river, which is quite open in this direction and runs in a long swell parallel to the Boers' position about three and a half miles from it to a point nearly opposite a flat-topped hill marked C. In order to reach a point on the Modder east of Poplar Grove by daylight it would have been necessary to leave Osfontein not later than ten o'clock on the previous evening.

The following briefly were the dispositions made by Lord Roberts :—The cavalry division, with Alderson's and Ridley's brigades of mounted infantry and seven batteries of horse-artillery, was directed to march at two in the morning, to circle round the Boer's left flank, take their line of entrenchments in reverse, and eventually reach the river near Poplar Grove and thus intercept their line of retreat.

The 6th division under General Kelly-Kenny, with its brigade division of field-artillery, one howitzer battery, and Martyr's mounted infantry, was to follow the route taken by the cavalry up to a point south-east of the Seven Kopjes. They were then to drive the enemy from this position and move northward in the direction of Table Mountain, a flat-topped height in the centre of the kopjes. Lord Roberts considered

Table Mountain to be the key of the Boers' southern position and that immediately it fell into our hands, the enemy would make a hasty retreat to the river. An attack on Table Mountain was therefore to be the second development of his plans. In this operation the 6th division was to be assisted by Flint's brigade division of field-artillery, four 4.7 naval guns, Le Gallais's brigade of mounted infantry, and the Guards' Brigade. The 14th brigade of the seventh division with its brigade division of field-artillery, Nesbitt's Horse, and the New South Wales and Queensland mounted infantry, were to march eastward along the south bank of the river for the purpose of threatening the enemy, and distracting his attention from the attack on Table Mountain, and were to assist the cavalry in preventing the Boers from crossing the river at the Poplar Grove Drift. Colvile's division, with three naval 12-pounders, and mounted infantry under De Lisle and Henry, was to act in a similar manner on the north bank of the river, and drive the enemy from Leeuwkop which formed the northern extremity of their defensive position.

The following summary description of the fighting-ground will help to make clear the details of the engagement, as they gradually developed.

Poplar Grove, marking the centre of the position occupied by the Boers, estimated at some 8000 strong, is a farm so named because of a clump of poplar trees growing on a ridge at its easterly abutment on the south bank of the Modder. Behind and north of the farm is the Poplar Grove Drift. Slightly to the west of the ridge stands a flat-topped table-hill, and further to the south-west a wide semicircle of hills known as the Seven Kopjes formed the enemy's left

flank; the group of hills that sweep from the river down to the Seven Kopjes made the enemy's main line of defence. Three miles to the east of the flat-topped hill and parallel to the Seven Kopjes a long low ridge, ending in a prominence with a farm alongside, bounds a stretch of far-reaching undulations. Beyond again, to the north-east, lay another of their positions, their last in retreat, along some kopjes reaching to the river, ending in a hill called Slagtkraal, just south of the Modder and east of Poplar Grove.

On Tuesday, March 6th, the cavalry rendezvoused at Osfontein. During the afternoon Lord Roberts had called the divisional commanders and brigadiers together in the barn at Osfontein Farm to explain to them the next day's operations, and reading his orders from the paper he held in his hand, sketched out very carefully the order of attack.

On returning from Headquarters Major Lawrence received orders from General French to be ready for starting at three the next morning. Being thoroughly familiar with the ground, Lawrence was to lead the division to a point near X. (see sketch), where French wished them to be at daybreak.

The moon had set by ten o'clock, and the night was dark. Shortly after two the camp was astir. The men had been given a hot meal and their horses fed; they were forbidden to talk, to smoke, or to carry lights on the march. By three General French and the division left camp, taking a south-easterly direction, on a march of over 32 miles. The order of march was in column of regimental masses, being set in motion from the right of each brigade to avoid a hill which lay on the left; the guns were on the left of the brigades; the 2nd brigade (Broadwood's) led

followed by the 3rd and 1st brigades, Ridley's mounted infantry forming the rear.

In excellent time (about five o'clock) Major Lawrence brought the division to the pan which was the spot specified to him by General French. Here a short halt was called till the first streaks of light showed upon the horizon, when the advance was resumed. Close by, Martyr's mounted infantry was arriving at a point one mile north-west of the cavalry division. The direction, which had been south-east by south, was now changed to east (in the direction of the dotted line). The columns were passing the south end of the enemy's position at a distance of two or three miles when the blue dawn broke and the film of mist which had hung over the veldt began to lift under the influence of approaching day. As with the light the enemy's position could be defined, our movements must have been equally clear to them.

The main body of the cavalry moving in column of masses, the left flank of the division covered by one squadron and another acting as advance guard, had just rounded the Seven Kopjes by six o'clock when the Boers opened fire with one gun from the extreme southern kopjes (a point about V.) without doing any damage. The shrapnel which rained over the troops had by the length of range lost its force, and merely struck without wounding our men; but to avoid better directed efforts of the fire, General French ordered a slight diversion to the south, and the division pushed to the end of a long rolling ridge (along which the dotted line in sketch II. runs).[1]

After a short halt about half-past seven, where some of the horses were watered at a large muddy pan just

[1] The lie of the ground at Poplar Grove from this point east and north is roughly shown in sketch II.

east of the aforesaid ridge, Broadwood's brigade pushed on north over the high ground towards the river, Kavanagh's squadron of the 10th Hussars actually occupying the farm; at the same time the brigade threatened the rear of the enemy's left flank.

Meanwhile General French and his Staff rode forward northwards (towards a point Z.) about three miles up to our advanced line of scouts, to examine the enemy's position at the flat-topped hill (C.) to the west and north. It was quickly apparent that the Boers, discerning the intention of the cavalry, were evacuating the hill and all the ground to the west. Some of them were now moving north towards Poplar Grove, others into the ridges running parallel to the Modder between it and the cavalry division. Wagons in rear of the hill were also seen heading for the river and disappearing behind the ridges. This gave a new complexion to the whole situation; it was an unforeseen and premature turn of affairs, which had not entered into the calculations of the general scheme of operations.

Large numbers of Boers were riding about in the open, skirmishing or in confusion just north of General French's point of observation (Z.). French instantly sent for the nearest guns, those of Porter on his left, to shell these bodies. It was a moment that asked for prompt action, a decision on the instant. There were two courses open, but either held risk and uncertainty; one lay direct across the roll of country north to Poplar Grove Drift, the other in a wide circuit round to the same point. The latter meant a less immediate resistance, but a delay that would have enabled the enemy to make ready his plans of defence and escape: the former offered a chance of dealing the Boers a heavy blow as they scattered in confusion before his charge; but complete success was impossible without

a speedy concentration and a quick movement to gather and close upon a flying enemy.

It was a crisis that could not but have spurred the mind of every cavalry-leader to instant action. Recognising that the real answer to the question lay in the condition of his horses, General French chose the straighter and shorter course. But even on the shorter route the pace failed, and without speed success could not be. Though he strained every nerve to overtake the enemy, the General had the mortification of seeing an opportunity such as has seldom been given to a cavalry force slip from him. Only three miles ahead was a disorganised force in full retreat, yet, crippled by broken-down animals, he was unable to bring up his brigades in time to throw them upon the close ranks of the enemy. Still he persevered, intent to compass, if not the ends he first had in view, some further work of damage.

Soon after, a rally was made by parties of Boers who had been retreating eastwards. Holding to a position on a rise sloping up from the plain and running from east to west, (about L.) they threw out strong flank guards to screen their main retreat, and opened a heavy rifle fire, supported by two guns (immediately to the left of L.). His chance of closing with the enemy gone, General French now led his whole force straight to the attack on this new Boer position, having Ridley's mounted infantry on the extreme left, with Porter nearest to him on the right, Broadwood on the extreme right, and Gordon connecting Porter with Broadwood, while Alderson's mounted infantry took places on either side of Gordon. The whole division advanced north-eastwards, ascending the rising ground which faced the low ridges now held by the Boer flank guards, and, dismounting, opened fire.

At this juncture one squadron of the 9th Lancers under Captain Lund galloped forward for the purpose of turning the Boers' right in an exposed position on the ridge. The attempt succeeded, but later on they were forced to fall back, being checked by skirmishers who inflicted considerable loss among the Lancers. Some of the retreating Boers, who had left the main position, were now seen moving up to the farm on the extreme south-eastern edge of the ridge, from which their skirmishers were receiving support. Against these General French sent Broadwood's brigade, which was nearest them, along with Alderson's mounted infantry and one battery, with orders to seize the most southern projection of the ridge, and by turning the Boer flank oust them from the farm.

By a wide movement these orders were successfully carried out. The Boers were driven from the farm, and a dismounted party of skirmishers, covering the long line of crest, galloped off in disorder over the plain lying between Schuinshoek and the river.

The horses of the division being very tired, the pursuit was handed over to the guns,—six guns each drawn by ten horses. They, too, had great difficulty in hurrying their jaded pace, but, the drivers sparing no exertion to push on eastwards, the battery got within effective range and firing in very rapid succession scattered the Boers in headlong flight across the country.

General French, who was with Broadwood's brigade, gave orders for a concentration of Ridley's mounted infantry, Gordon's brigade and his battery of artillery, which, with Porter's battery, had been shelling the northern ridge with effect, and directed them to follow Broadwood in his turning movement round the Boer left towards the river. The enemy's front

was meanwhile to be held by Porter till the appearance of Kelly-Kenny's division with which he was to keep in communication. The Boers stood stoutly by the ridge for some time, but were forced gradually to relax their grip on it, and broken parties of them retreated in a northerly direction, while others made off east and south-east.

The day was wearing on, and it was necessary to press forward if Slagtkraal, the hill nearest the river and our new objective, was to be taken in such time as would render its occupation fully effective. Broadwood's brigade was directed on the river, and worked up towards Slagtkraal; at a distance of two miles from the stream the advance was checked by a severe shell-fire from two guns on the east side of the hill, and also by a hot Mauser fusilade from parties of Boers who had retreated to the south-east.

Gordon's brigade and Ridley's mounted infantry now joined with Alderson and Broadwood, and as time pressed (the hour being already three in the afternoon) General French, without further pause, decided upon an immediate advance by a movement of the combined forces dismounted. The enemy's position had been gradually shifted eastward, and its centre rested now on Schuinshoek Hill; to the north of it lay Salderpoort farm, and beyond was Slagtkraal abutting on the river. Broadwood and Gordon's brigades pushed out south of Schuinshoek Hill, and in face of opposition forced their way north to Salderpoort farm, and took the Boer position in reverse. Simultaneously Alderson's mounted infantry was advancing with the guns to attack the front and clear the ridge which slopes off from the hill to the river-bed. The movement was successful, the artillery and Mauser fire was put down, and the hill was ours. While these

operations were in progress Porter had found his front clearing; at two o'clock he moved nearer the river, dropping into the position (L.) vacated by the Boers, and then, hearing Broadwood's guns heavily engaged on his right flank, he went on in support joining him at Salderpoort farm. The concentrated forces were now sufficiently advanced to press home the main operation. A combined advance was made on Slagtkraal with five batteries massed in the centre under Colonel Davidson, Porter's brigade on the left, Gordon on the right, and the mounted infantry in the rear.

The Boer guns on the river bank were speedily silenced, and by five o'clock the stubborn resistance which had been encountered all day was overcome. Slagtkraal, a hill commanding the drift and the banks of the river, fell into our hands, but too late unfortunately to intercept the enemy. They were pursued eastwards by one regiment for a few miles, but outpaced us.

Broadwood's horses were unable from sheer exhaustion, to move another step, and the brigade was obliged to fall behind and halt at Salderpoort Dam until late in the evening, when they rejoined the remainder of the division.

The day's work had driven the enemy out of a naturally strong and well-entrenched position which blocked the way to Bloemfontein; but it had sorely tried the troops, the heat having been terribly oppressive, and the horses 14 hours under saddle, for the most part without water.

The operations of Poplar Grove present an interesting problem in tactics, and indeed few actions have been more freely or adversely criticised. Was it premeditated, asks the critic, to surround and capture the

enemy? If so, that object failed, and the disappointment felt and expressed was justified, for instead of hemming the Boers in to their positions the cavalry drove them out practically without the infantry being called upon to fire a shot. So effectually were the Boers beaten away that the cavalry took possession of the position, and the main army was enabled to march at once on Bloemfontein.

The question as to Lord Roberts's intention is answered by himself in his published despatches. He acknowledges having contemplated out-manœuvring and enveloping the Boers with the view of encompassing their wholesale surrender and capture. His plan of engaging the enemy in front while the cavalry worked round his rear, simple and theoretically sound as it was, must have been based on the assumption that the enemy, strongly placed, would, forgetting the Paardeberg lesson, remain to defend his positions. It was only on this assumption proving correct that the cavalry could have had time to carry out their part in his plans. Had the Boers stood their ground the cavalry would certainly have encircled them; but seeing that their plans for entrapping us had failed and our cavalry heading round their left, and, moreover, demoralized after Paardeberg, the enemy slipped quickly away, and the whole aspect of the day was changed.

To effect an envelopment unperceived by the enemy, that is to say, for the cavalry in the first instance to have made a sweep wide enough to reach unobserved and unsuspected a point from which they could dash on the river, must have involved operations covering a longer time than the few hours to which they were restricted. Had the division made their start the previous evening under cover of darkness, things might have gone differently; but starting at three

in the morning, at the same time with the infantry, it was absolutely impossible for the cavalry to be anywhere near the river by daylight. Once day had broke, all concealment was at an end.

General French moved south-east to Kalkfontein, clear of the enemy's extended front, yet sufficiently close to turn his flank in the time prescribed. The Boers, seeing him on their left and finding their two guns powerless to check his advance, anticipated his rush on the river, and fell back on their south-easterly defences. Having turned their flank French caught sight of the long line of retreating wagons, but he could only bring his artillery fire to bear on them as they were too well protected by neighbouring kopjes for attack. By ten o'clock he had pushed forward to the rising country four miles south-east of the flat-topped hill, and found the Boers at all points in full retreat north-eastwards.

Seeing this, and believing that their retreat would be along the river-banks, General French, instead of completing his turn round the ridge to the rear of the enemy, endeavoured to take a short cut over a rolling down to circumvent them at the river, and found himself delayed by a good deal of opposition. Had he taken the longer road, he must also have encountered obstruction and harassment from their inlying positions, and the cavalry being forced probably wider afield, the Boers, taking advantage of the difficult country by the river, and with time in their favour to enable concentration, would, under cover of a strong rearguard defence, in which they excel, have had an even better chance of making good their escape. Of the two General French undoubtedly chose the wiser course; but having entered upon it, can he be said to have turned his opportunities to the best account?

This was certainly an occasion for the cavalry arm to fulfil its chief calling of turning a defeat into a rout and capturing the enemy's guns and wagons. General French would be justified in reminding us that such functions are generally supposed to be the distinctive duties of cavalry after the infantry and guns have attacked and defeated the enemy, the cavalry during the action being kept somewhere under cover with their horses resting, until the critical moment arrives when they are sent in pursuit, and that an excessive effort was expected of him to ride down or head off a retreating enemy whose horses were rested and in good condition, while his men had been in the saddle since three in the morning, and had covered a long distance with horses weak and leg-weary from the outset.

It has been urged that the cavalry was slow, that Broadwood's brigade was making good headway towards the river, and should not have been drawn nearer in,—that General French, in fact, did not attack with the necessary vigour before the south-easterly ridge, and that, finding himself checked and unable to work round, he should have broken through, as at Klipdrift. But the charge outside Kimberley was mainly through a flank fire, while here the Boers were in front, and to try to carry their position by a direct attack must have meant not success, but certain destruction, and probable annihilation.

Yet withal, the chances of inflicting damage on the retreating enemy cannot be denied, had General French exercised his usual judgment and not taken too seriously the efforts of a very skilfully manœuvred flank guard of the enemy on our right which made a greater show of strength than it actually possessed, whereby he lost time when every moment was of value. This force

not only inflicted 50 casualties on us, but kept the division at bay for fully two hours, saving part of their own baggage and possibly some guns from capture, and serves as an example of what skilful audacity can do.

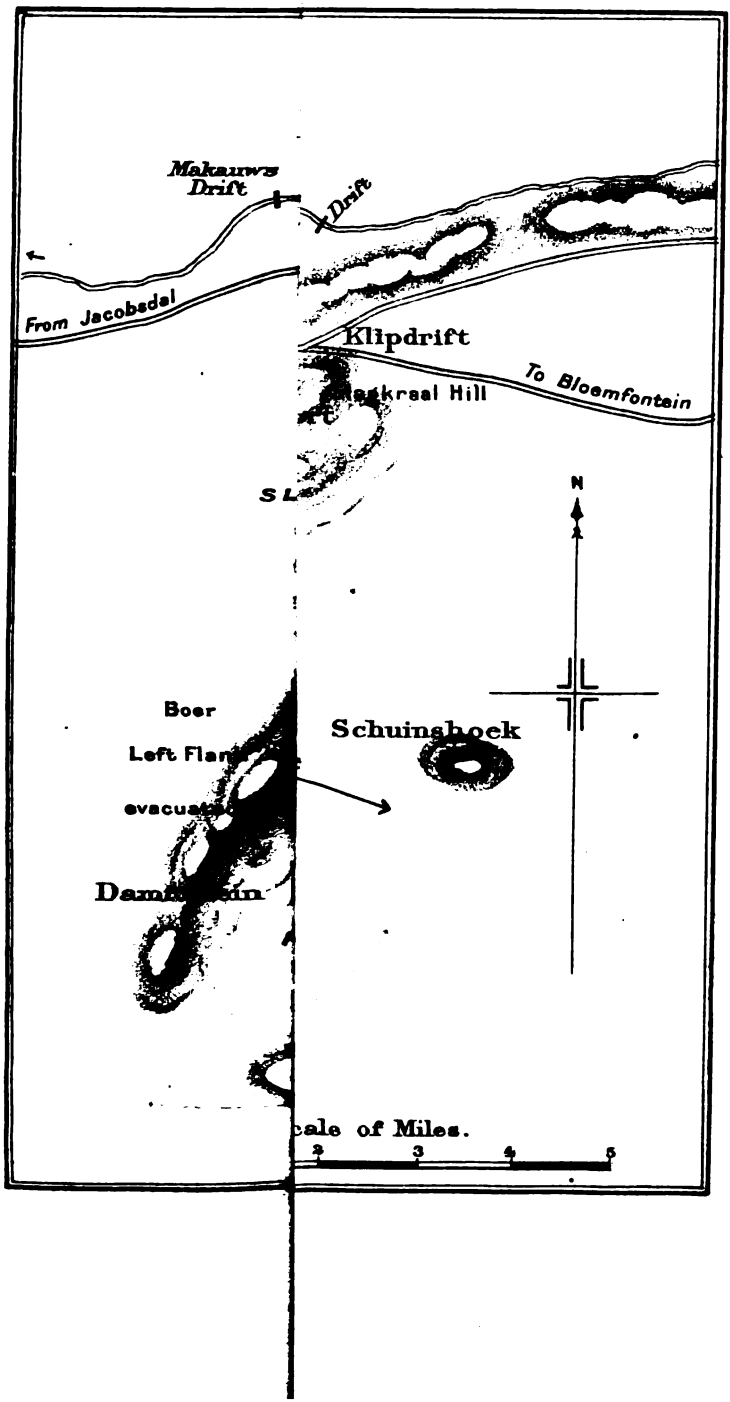
The opportunity was gone when General French found himself able to move, as the last of the Boer wagons was then disappearing over the ridge six or seven miles away, and his horses were by that time scarcely able to raise a trot for even a few yards.

But even admitting that the concentration of the brigades was unsuitable to meet the new development of the situation, and that in consequence the chances that are given by working on a wider front were not theirs, and further that French missed an opportunity by allowing himself to be unduly delayed, the comments of Lord Roberts on the engagement make it sufficiently clear that whatever else may have contributed to the failure of the operations, the main cause is to be found in the condition of the horses. In Broadwood's brigade they literally stopped dead in their tracks, and no encouragement could bring them into camp at the river by nightfall. In the horse-artillery matters were even worse, for it became dangerous for the poor creatures to drag the guns into action, lest their strength should fail to bring them out again.

What could be expected of animals which for weeks had existed on a miserable herbage, and a daily ration of two and a half pounds of oats? Such nourishment could not possibly raise them from the state to which they had been reduced, or give them strength in an emergency. The standard of their efficiency is the measure by which the operations must be judged, and their debilitated condition, especially after a night

march, would in itself explain the choice of the short cut towards the river across the downs, rather than a more circuitous route. The weak staying-powers of the horses, the enemy in flight, the prospect of cutting off their retreat by an overwhelming charge, would seem to justify General French in a course which, moreover, must have appealed irresistibly to a leader of his temper and intrepidity. Yet again, had the dispositions allowed the cavalry to reach the drift by daylight, the enemy's outlet south of the river must have been barred, and their sole other means of escape, by the north bank under cover of Leeuwkop, blocked by De Lisle and Henry.

The failure to surround the Boers was clearly attributable not in any degree to defects in executive operations on the field, but to the details of the plan as a whole not having been evolved in the first instance with sufficient preciseness of calculation.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CHAPTER VI

ABRAHAM'S KRAAL

THE fortune of war now gave to General French the task of driving the enemy from the positions they had fallen back on at Abraham's Kraal and Driefontein, and he was soon to find himself engaged in another encounter, perhaps the most obstinate yet undergone with the enemy.

Uncertain of the intentions of the retreating Boers, Lord Roberts did not make a concerted plan of attack, but moved on a very wide front towards Bloemfontein, and with no specific dispositions beyond ordering the divisions on the right and left to remain in touch with the centre; but the function of the left column was, keeping wide of the enemy, to push past them, unless forced to attack, and cover the eastward movement of the columns in the centre and on the right.

The enemy having been driven from Poplar Grove and the way for the further advance effectually cleared, General French applied himself to the necessary preparations, trusting that the supply-wagons would arrive overnight from Osfontein. But being disappointed and chafing under the delay at being kept back, he took over the supplies from Ridley's mounted infantry, thus contriving to procure forage enough to serve Porter's brigade and Alderson's mounted infantry until the

following morning. The temporary difficulty overcome, orders for the advance were immediately issued, and the first brigade and Alderson's mounted infantry marched out at three in the afternoon accompanied by the General himself and his Staff. They had proceeded 12 miles along the river, in the direction of Abraham's Kraal, when a halt took place at Waaihoek Mill farm, where the 6th division, in advance of them over the same ground, also went into bivouac: the remainder of Lord Roberts's army had made no further movement that day. Here a welcome rest was enjoyed by the jaded mounted troops. They found plenty of grass, wood, and fresh meat, and more refreshing perhaps than any supplies was the opportunity of bathing in the Modder, which at this point runs over a picturesque rocky bed.

Two squadrons, which had been despatched south-eastwards in the early morning, returned soon after noon and reported the enemy in force on the hills near Abraham's Kraal, about six miles ahead. Another squadron, under Major Butler of the Carabiniers, sent out to collect further information, brought back intelligence that they had seen about 2000 of the enemy leaving this position in a northerly direction. Some of Rimington's Guides were accordingly detailed to cross over to the north bank and there observe and report upon any movement in that direction.

General French, believing that the forces of the Transvaal and the Free State had separated after the operations at Poplar Grove, and were pursuing different ways, never expected any serious barrier to his advance east on Baberspan, and was surprised to find that the enemy had established themselves in a strong position at Abraham's Kraal, with their right flank resting on the river.

Abraham's Kraal, from which a drift derives its name, consists of a farm-house and store, and is situated on the main road from Kimberley to Bloemfontein, close to the south bank of the river. At right angles with the stream stands a well-defined ridge, curving out from the south bank in a south-easterly direction for four miles, then after an irregular interval of broken formation it again projects due south with a gradually increasing elevation, and culminates at Driefontein farm, eight miles from the river. The main road runs along the flat, almost parallel with the ridges. The structure of the ridge is intermittent, with clefts and rounded kopjes in its course, but there is no gap wide enough to admit of troops passing through without danger of exposure to a deadly rifle fire from the overlooking heights. At Driefontein this ridge almost connects with another, which throws out spurs and projections, describing an easterly course parallel with the river, but separated from it by a stretch of low-lying ground.

Judging from the enemy's dispositions, it is certain that they reckoned on our marching straight by the river-bank. Their main force was concentrated at the hills nearest to the river, with their flank resting upon it. These hills were strongly entrenched, particularly the north-eastern and south-western slopes, and their positions were well concealed. On one side of the lower detached features was posted a Creusot gun, which caused unceasing annoyance in the subsequent fighting. Slightly in the rear of the main ridge, and close to the river, stands a hill on the south-east side strengthened with three terraces of trenches. From this hill, along the south bank of the river, west to the main drift, a series of shelter-trenches and rifle-pits had been dug which were screened from view by trees.

The Boer force collected at Abraham's Kraal numbered 5000 to 6000 men, including Colonel Villebois and the foreign contingent. Presidents Kruger and Steyn, who were also present, addressed their burghers from the stoep (verandah) of Oertel's store. Kruger exhorted them to make a firm stand, assuring them of certain victory. England's best fighting regiment, the Black Watch, had, he said, already been destroyed, and what remained of her army could with calmness and boldness easily be disposed of.

It was reported that Villebois and his contingent intended to make a flank attack upon our left, but as we did not advance in the direction expected, his opportunity was missed, and he is supposed to have retired across the river by Truter's Drift with his own force and 2,000 Free Staters who took no part in the fight.

Late in the evening orders were issued for an advance on Bloemfontein. The army was to march in three columns. In the centre was the Commander-in-Chief, with the 9th division and Guards' Brigade, the 2nd cavalry brigade (Broadwood's), and Le Gallais's and Martyr's mounted infantry, General Tucker's division and the 3rd cavalry brigade (Gordon's) and Ridley's mounted infantry on the right; General French was on the left with the 6th (Kelly-Kenny's) infantry division, the 1st cavalry brigade (Porter's) and Alderson's mounted infantry. The force was expected to reach Bloemfontein on March 13th, the first evening's bivouac to be Baberspan for the left column, Driefontein for the centre, and Petrusberg for the right.

The reason for using this route rather than the northern and most direct road, by and beyond Baberspan to Bloemfontein, was because there was ground

for believing that the enemy expected Lord Roberts to advance by that road, and were ready to oppose him in a strongly entrenched position which they had prepared in the vicinity of Bainsvlei.

Our forward movement on Abraham's Kraal commenced on the morning of March 10th. The 6th division, with a distance of nine miles to traverse from their bivouac, set out at six in the morning, the line of advance being by the main road. Four miles ahead was the cavalry bivouac. The baggage, ammunition, and supply columns were to start an hour later and follow the 6th division with Alderson's mounted infantry (less three companies) acting as rear-guard. Porter's brigade (less one squadron detached as advanced guard) and two companies of mounted infantry, had been directed to set out at the earlier hour in a south-easterly direction, and to assemble three-quarters of an hour later at a point where the Waaihoek farm road and the main road to Abraham's Kraal converge. Here they were to await the approach of the 6th division and then resume their advance.

The morning broke fine, without fog or haze. The men were mentally and physically revived, and their horses refreshed, by the rest and nourishment of the day before. From the point of rendezvous two lines of kopjes could be descried standing out clear in the direction of the advance. One was the ridge already portrayed with its northern extremity on the Modder River at Abraham's Kraal. At its southern end was a break, or nek, about a mile and a half wide, beyond which the second line of ridge followed a direction almost due south. The direction of march was south-east towards the nek, through which General French intended to lead the division. Along the route he

awaited news from Major Scobell, who had gone forward with his squadron of the Scots Greys, and about 80 men of the mounted infantry under Captain Bainbridge, their orders being to reconnoitre the situation at Abraham's Kraal and to join the column as it came up with them later.

At daylight Major Scobell had reached a point two miles west of the Abraham's Kraal ridge. His scouts were pushed forward to within 300 or 400 yards of the kopjes, when a heavy fire was opened on them, and they retired to a small flat hill, topped by a stone-walled kraal, which, though only 2000 yards from the Boer positions, the enemy had for some inexplicable reason left unoccupied. Scobell at once seized this vantage point, whence he commanded an excellent view. He could plainly discern that the nearest ridge opposite him was held by several hundreds of Boers, and that they were swarming everywhere on the farther ridges to the south and south-east. Two guns were located and a possible third. This intelligence was at once despatched to General French, who was then advancing with his division across the flat. Orders came back that Major Scobell was to remain on observation and to act as flank guard, holding the Boer front, until relieved.

Still bearing away from the river General French continued a south-easterly course without anything occurring to denote more precisely the strength in which the enemy's position was held. At half-past nine a halt was called for an hour to allow the infantry to rest, and Porter was then directed to dispose his force as march outposts two miles ahead of the infantry. Two squadrons were sent out to reconnoitre towards Baberspan, with orders to report as to the best road for the advance of the cavalry division, that it should not

come within the enemy's range. A troop was also disposed to proceed still more to the south, to establish communication with Lord Roberts. A detachment of Alderson's mounted infantry, consisting of two squadrons of Roberts's Horse under Captain Pack Beresford, went to relieve Scobell's party, which had been under heavy fire all the morning, and were instructed to rejoin the column as soon as all risk of an attack in that quarter had passed. The relief was effected shortly before noon, and just as they were moving off the hill, a gun, previously located, opened fire on them from the river.

At this moment great activity was discernible among the Boers. In parties of 40 to 50 they were quitting Abraham's Kraal and streaming across to reinforce those who were holding the Driefontein Ridge, seven or eight miles to the south-east.

The advance of Porter's brigade had barely proceeded a mile and a half when, as it was nearing the head of the nek, two long-range guns opened fire on them from the Abraham's Kraal position (C.). Porter sent a battery of artillery and two companies of mounted infantry at a gallop to a point from which they could bombard the Boer front and attempt to silence these guns. With the remainder of his brigade he intended to advance against the hills on the south side of the nek, but it was soon evident they were held. Porter decided that this position also should be bombarded and attacked with rifle fire. Colonel Alexander, of the Scots Greys, with a battery of guns and two squadrons, was accordingly sent forward against it; but the position was found to be too strongly held to admit of headway being made. General French's Intelligence Officer had meanwhile galloped back to his chief to explain the situation, and returned

to Porter with orders to swing off to the south and push on his brigade as fast as possible in an attempt to outflank the position. Heliographic communication was also established with Broadwood, at the time moving towards Driefontein, who proffered his assistance.

Porter acted immediately on his instructions, but the Boers, already become apprehensive that the cavalry would attempt a turning movement in the south-east, were by this time extending their left further from the main position at Abraham's Kraal to combat the threatened danger. Forced to the conclusion that the position was too extensive for a further flank movement, Porter determined to press a dismounted attack on the southern ridge. The Australians and Garratt's squadron on foot tried what impression they could make. Disregarding a shower of bullets they pushed their way up the hill, and reaching the crest line, came under a severe fire from the Driefontein hills behind, but making a resolute stand they maintained their ground and gradually cleared the ridge. In spite of the enemy's stubborn defence the position was gained.

General French, who had ridden forward to make a personal survey of Porter's situation, decided to make still another effort, by a wider flanking operation, to turn the enemy's positions round the south and towards the river, by the rear of the Driefontein ridges. Major Sprot was to push on with four squadrons and two batteries and attempt to get round Driefontein, and the remainder of Porter's brigade was to follow the moment Kelly-Kenny's division had come up to relieve them.

No sooner had Sprot started on his way when a body of about 700 Boers, known as the Johannesburg Police, was observed on horseback in regular formation,

crossing from Abraham's Kraal to the Driefontein ridges, which run eastward at right angles, as already described. Major Sprot succeeded in getting round what proved to be the southern flank of the enemy, occupying an artillery position which commanded a field of fire across the open plain lying between the Abraham's Kraal line of hills and a long rocky ridge running back from these, known as the Driefontein. The guns came into action against numbers of Boers crossing the plain from the western hills, which they had vacated to defend the Driefontein position, and did good execution.

In the interval Kelly-Kenny's troops were joining hands with Porter, having been fired at during their march by two long-range guns on Abraham's Kraal kopje. He was unable to keep down the fire, his field-artillery being outranged, but fortunately few of the Boer shells burst, else much damage might have been done, for the aim was true. Kelly-Kenny was able to make but slow headway, owing to the numerical strength of the enemy threatening opposition to his advance, and during the morning he had to content himself with containing the Boers, leaving the cavalry to engage their left and take off the frontal pressure.

The infantry having relieved the cavalry in the position already secured on the southern ridge, Porter with the remainder of his brigade was free to engage in following Sprot in his outflanking movement. So extended had this southern movement become that a portion of French's force was now in front of the centre column of Colvile's division.

So soon as Porter had turned the southern edge of the ridge, a severe artillery fire was opened on him from the end and rear of the Driefontein position, to which his batteries vigorously replied, both sides

keeping up the shelling till dark. Sprot in the meantime was pushing on in the hope of getting round the Boer rear.

Broadwood had already made good progress towards the same end. His original orders took him to Driefontein where he was to bivouac, but finding that General French was engaged, and as no plan of action had been concerted, a fight not being expected, Broadwood decided on his own account to push beyond Driefontein. He believed that French was operating against the Boers' right flank with the intention of turning it, which would have the effect of driving the enemy along the road south-east towards Bloemfontein, their one outlet of escape. Hoping to work in with this movement he determined with all possible speed to get at a point on the main Bloemfontein road from where he could intercept the retreat. Unfortunately on approaching the Driefontein hills he found himself opposed by the enemy, and lost some time in moving wider out to avoid them. As he passed Baberspan he got on to the main road and was joined by Sprot. Here, seeing that General French instead of turning the Boers' right flank had gradually edged round so as to turn their left, Broadwood decided, in spite of shell fire from the Driefontein hills, to make straight for the river, and detached Sprot and his squadron with orders to cover his right or exposed flank and to circle out widely to the south and south-east. The flanking squadron, coming under a hot fire from the spurs of Aasvogelkop where the Boers had a gun and many riflemen, soon found their movement brought to a stand-still, and Sprot, his horses being exhausted, was obliged to fall back again on his brigade. Broadwood himself made some further progress, but was prevented by darkness from reach-

ing the river where he had hoped to intercept a portion of the Boers' retreat.

While Broadwood was developing this movement, the enemy were occupied against our advancing infantry, maintaining upon them an incessant fire, which swept from the Abraham's Kraal hill along the whole length of the ridges, ending with two guns doing active work at Driefontein. The position of the infantry was rendered most uncomfortable, if not insecure. Especially annoying was a long Mauser fire, kept up without ceasing from the Driefontein heights. General Kelly-Kenny was not in the mood tamely to allow his troops to remain the sport of Boer gun and rifle. The day was wearing on, and they must either reach Baberspan before evening or bivouac on the spot; in either case the enemy must not retain possession of the Driefontein hills, which commanded the front of his position. He knew that Broadwood, coming from the main centre, was heading north-east and would already be well to the rear of the force posted on these longitudinal ridges, and resolved therefore that, formidable as the positions were, he would drive the Boers out of them. It was necessary, in the first place, to guard his own rear and cover the supply-trains against possible attack from the river-side, a duty he entrusted to General Knox with the West Ridings and Oxfords and one field-battery; this left General Kelly-Kenny with two field-batteries and five battalions, namely the 2nd Buffs, 1st Yorkshires, 1st Essex, 1st Welsh, and 2nd Gloucesters. Orders were given to General Stevenson's brigade to advance over the ridge and across the high ground beyond. The Welsh were placed in the centre, the Essex on the left, and the Yorkshires on the right, but in echelon in rear of the outer flank with a view to

their operating on the enemy's left. The Buffs and Gloucesters were held in reserve in rear of the centre. The line was widely extended, especially on the right, as the troops kept to the high ground, avoiding the intervening valleys.

The advance had not proceeded far when the enemy's fire became so heavy that the general forward movement suffered a check. The Welsh regiment was the first to make ground decisively, but such a hot fire was concentrated upon them that Kelly-Kenny found it necessary to order up the Buffs with all speed, and later on to supplement them with two companies of the Gloucesters. The Buffs were soon in line, and with assistance from them and from two batteries of field-artillery the Welsh were enabled to establish their position. The centre was now strong enough to turn on their opponents, and pressing forward with great determination, they succeeded by a combined effort in driving the Boers before them from one ridge to another. The Yorkshires were drawn in to their left to deal with the left of the Boers' main position, but the enemy's fire drew them on to attack a kopje standing to the south-east, which our guns were shelling, and involved them in action about 600 yards from the hill.

The engagement was by this time in full swing, but the stubbornness and tenacity of the enemy allowed of little progress being made. The Essex had advanced on the ridge to a prominence more easterly than that first occupied, and at an hour after the advance had begun they were drawn in to their right to attack the eastern side of the Boers' main position, their direction being to the left and rather to the front of the Welsh. The advance across the open was carried on with steadiness, despite a withering fire

from a heavy gun on their rear and a Vickers-Maxim on their left flank. Unfaltering, they pressed on close to the coveted position, and the assault was ordered. Well-seasoned regiments, the Essex, Welsh, and Buffs, could not lightly be deterred. Their opponents were the Johannesburg Police who resolutely held on to the main projection of the ridge. The order to charge having been given, the Essex, not to be denied, rushed hotly up from the flat with bayonets fixed, and threw themselves upon the Boers' right flank. With equal dash and resolution the Welsh and Buffs surged over the crest of the kopjes. The impetus of the concerted onslaught was irresistible. The position became untenable; the Johannesburg Police gave way, and rushed in headlong flight towards the river.

Driven off the fiercely debated ground, and their flanks imperilled by the cavalry, the Boers had no choice but to yield their southern positions. Disorganized, they fled for shelter to the more northerly hills abutting on the river at Abraham's Kraal, which they had held all day, and kept a heavy gun at work until nightfall. Had they retreated eastward, Broadwood and his cavalry might have cut them off; by making straight for Abraham's Kraal they were fortunate enough to get clear away. It is thought they continued their retreat across the drift at this point, and then moved along the north bank of the river. Some critics maintain that Broadwood ought to have intercepted and captured them. As circumstances developed, it is difficult to see how he could have done so, even had his advance been more rapid, or had he not allowed himself to be delayed by the shell fire directed upon him from the north.

In considering the issue of the engagement, due weight should be given to the fact that the dispositions

made for the eastern advance did not contemplate serious hostilities in this neighbourhood, certainly not operations covering such an extensive area. It was not believed that the enemy would rally for a stand at Abraham's Kraal after his discomfiture at Poplar Grove. The Boers imagined that the natural strength of their positions on the north bank of the river secured them against attack in that direction, and that our most probable line of advance was between the trap-like hills immediately to the south of the river at Abraham's Kraal, which they had made strong with entrenchments. Lest they should fail to keep us to the desired route, and we should attempt to outflank the positions they had prepared, their front was extended eight miles from north to south, with the great advantage of the Driefontein ridge stretching back from the southerly extremity. The ridge gave additional strength to their position; falling back on it they could oppose and delay our advance were we to attempt a flanking movement.

Followed and faced by a fire that edged them in and out from hill to hill and the armed ridges beyond, the only mounted force with General French, Porter's attenuated brigade and two companies of mounted infantry, succeeded in gaining the southern end of the enemy's position over which the infantry were able to pass, threatened the extreme flanks of the Boers, and by holding an important hill just south of the river warded off pressure from the infantry's flank and rear. Much good work was done, but the extended and strongly held positions of the Boers kept the cavalry from getting deep enough in the rear to close off the flight of the enemy as they yielded to Kelly-Kenny's bold attack. The troops met with no further resistance till they neared Bloemfontein.

The losses of the enemy during the day were very heavy, 102 dead Boers being found on the field. Our success was not achieved without costly sacrifice. Four of our officers were killed and 16 wounded. Among the rank and file 51 were killed and 321 wounded, while 26 were missing. Of the officers who fell, Lieutenant Parsons of the Essex had already been recommended for the Victoria Cross for his gallantry at Paardeberg; Captain and Adjutant Lomax of the Welsh, Captain Eustace of the Buffs, and Second-Lieutenant Coddington of the Essex were all great losses to their regiments. In the artillery the loss was also severely felt of Lieut.-Colonel Umphelby of the Australian artillery, then attached to the staff of General Kelly-Kenny.

General French made his head-quarters for the night at a small dam three quarters of a mile east of Driefontein; Broadwood's brigade bivouacked near Driepan, the 6th division on a ridge two miles north of Driefontein farm, Porter's brigade at Surrey Dam, Martyr's and Le Gallais's mounted infantry on the hills to the north, and Gordon's brigade was with Tucker's division at Petrusberg.

The eastward march of the main column was resumed early next morning, followed by the 2nd brigade and the 6th division. The Boers had been so thoroughly dispersed that no opposition was met with during the day, and all that was seen of them was a retreating body of 250 men. After proceeding as far as Doornboom, the cavalry bivouacked there for the night, with the 6th division encamped three miles to the north.

All through the next day the advance continued without opposition; small detachments of Boers had been seen from time to time driving cattle into the

hills, but otherwise nothing was visible of them for miles around. About four in the afternoon, however, the reconnoitring squadrons reported that the enemy were entrenched at the base of the Brandkop hills, to the north-east of Poundisford, seven miles south-west of Bloemfontein. Allenby's advanced guard seized some detached kopjes, just above Brandkop dam, within about 2500 yards of the enemy's position, and his patrols found a Boer outpost stationed on one of the higher ridges. These ridges held by the enemy, and running from east to west, extend to the line of railway which crosses through a gap in the formation. His left secured by Allenby's squadrons, General French took forward the main body of five squadrons at a rapid pace, intending to carry the bluff forming the edge of the ridge on the east of the line, which he considered would disunite the Boer position on the ridge to the west of the line, and also other important positions towards Bloemfontein. The march had covered a distance of 28 miles, but there was to be no delay. Major Scobell's squadron of the Greys was ordered to cross the nek through which the railway runs and to seize this commanding bluff. In setting out, and before reaching the railway, he came under a rather hot fire from the adjacent kopje on his left at about 1200 to 1500 yards range. While halting to cut a wire fence, no less than nine horses were hit, and the men's accoutrements were shot through, but not a skin was scratched. The railway line was protected by another wire fence so thick that no cutters Scobell had with him could make any impression on it, and he was accordingly obliged to turn down to the west, where, after meeting Porter, they managed to break through. In front of them lay the long low kopje they were to take, and they

were fired on from its east end. Porter urging him on to instantaneous action, Scobell had no time for scouting. He and his men (about 65 in all) drew swords and made a rush for the west end. Arrived at the base, Scobell dismounted all the men he could, and walked up the slope. On the top was a flat piece of ground nearly half a mile wide, and as they advanced over this voices were heard on the other, or north, side of the ridge. Scobell had been told that a squadron of Roberts's Horse would be in support, and presuming it was they, signalled them accordingly. No answer forthcoming he ran across to the edge of the kopje, which was fairly steep, where an extraordinary sight met his eye. The sun was setting, but there was plenty of light to see some 400 to 500 Boers leaving the kopje and scattering over the plain. Some were within 100 yards, having scarcely mounted their horses; others were further off. Coming from the opposite direction were about 200 more Boers, who were evidently expostulating with those who had left the kopje. Scobell's party firing brisk volleys into them until it was dark added to the existing confusion. Deceived as to our numbers, the Boers all galloped away, unaware of the fact that less than 40 men had caused their rout. Scobell sent word back to Porter, who replied that the kopje must be held at all costs till daybreak, and that the remainder of the Greys would reinforce him, though in fact the only reinforcement to arrive consisted of 'Rimington and some 60 or 70 of his men. At daybreak General French and Porter rode up to the kopje with a battery and Roberts's Horse. A pleasant surprise awaited them, for as the morning cleared it was seen that this hill commanded Bloemfontein at a range of less than 4000 yards. No other troops were across the

railway until daybreak, except a detachment of mounted infantry, who held a smaller hill not far off.

While Scobell's squadron of Greys was gaining this important position, Alderson's mounted infantry had occupied the smaller kopje already mentioned, just north of the Infectious Diseases Hospital, under cover of the fire of a battery of horse-artillery, which a Boer Vickers-Maxim vainly tried to silence. The Boers left the kopje just as darkness set in, and the brigade bivouacked near the hospital.

The Boers continued shelling us heavily with a pom-pom till eleven o'clock from a hill opposite Alderson, one of the batteries of horse-artillery replying to them in the darkness.

Headquarters bivouacked at Steyn's Farm, and Broadwood's brigade joined at nine.

Late that night Major Hunter-Weston undertook a hazardous enterprise to destroy the line north of Bloemfontein. He set out at one o'clock with one officer of Engineers, seven volunteers drawn from a field-troop and the cavalry, and two guides, each man provided with gun-cotton. From Ferreira Spruit they kept north-east, leaving Bloemfontein three to four miles on their left, and within a mile of Bloemspruit farm moved west to strike the railway line. After eluding the notice of a patrol and clearing a deep water-course with great difficulty in the blackness of the night, they at last struck the railway by four o'clock. Cutting the telegraph in two places, they removed the wires, and discovering a culvert, within twenty minutes of their reaching the railway, had blown it up and were on their way back.

They had not gone far when, in the faint light of early dawn, they descried, only thirty yards away, on the other side of the deep broad cutting they had to

cross, a strong Boer picket entrenched. This was no occasion for taking council. Passing the word to charge, at the head of his tiny band Hunter-Weston dashed to the opening in the bank, slid down it followed by his men, and were close on the Boers, when they flew to their horses and were off and away without firing a shot, to rejoin a picket further south. Some shells were aimed at them before clearing the last watercourse, but undeterred they rode on and passed the line of advanced scouts north-east of the town. Owing to the destruction of the line 25 engines and 108 trucks fell into our hands.

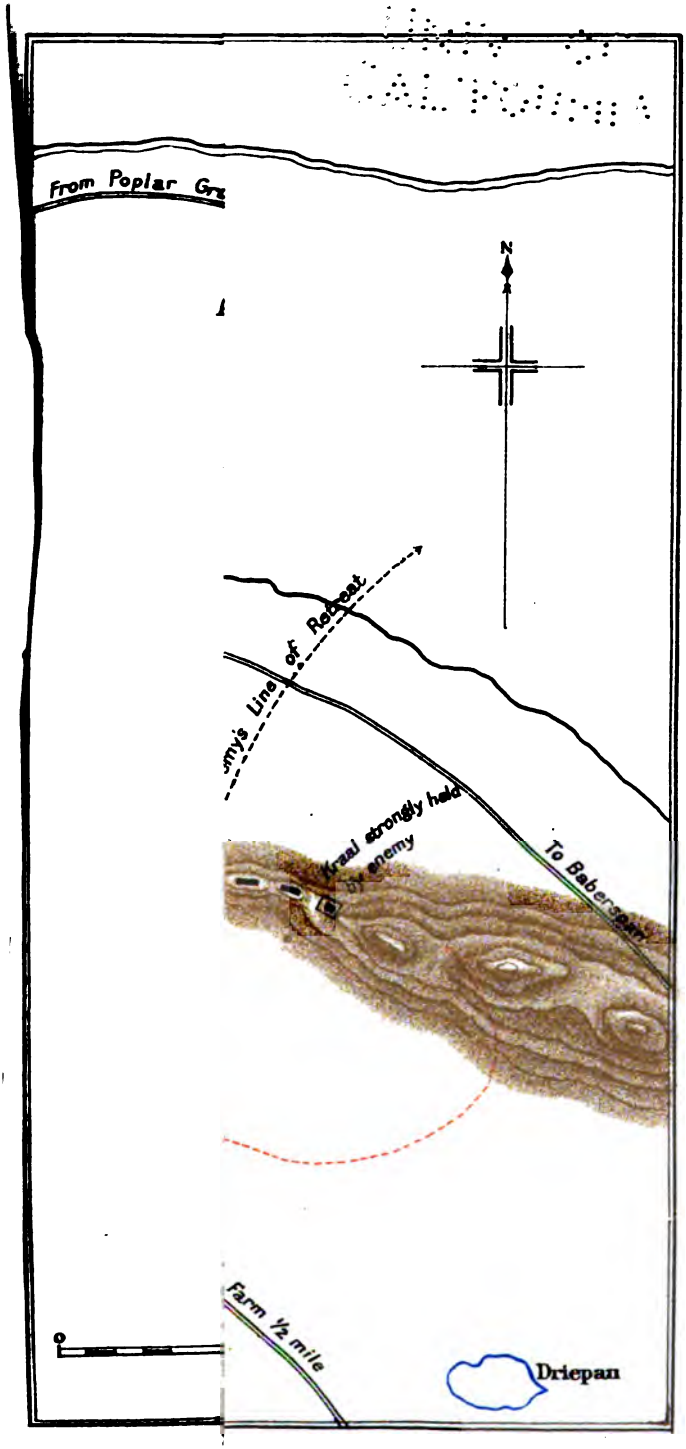
At three on the previous afternoon General French had sent a summons to the people of Bloemfontein to surrender or leave the town within 24 hours. Before daybreak next morning he had left Steyn's farm, and, finding the Boers in the same positions as on the night before, sent off Broadwood's brigade eastwards to Porter's rear and on to the north to seize the northern approaches of the town, while two batteries of horse-artillery bombarded the hills to the north and north-west heavily from the bluff. Small parties of Boers retreated before Broadwood and slipped away north from the hills west of the railway.

Later on two squadrons pushed forward to a hill above the Kaffir Location, one mile south-east of Bloemfontein, and were joined by a battery of artillery. Gordon's brigade coming within four miles of Porter's position on the bluff, enabled General French to send the latter to block all exits north and north-west of the town and to follow up the Boers in their retreat. The enemy was completely outmanœuvred, abandoning all their positions and every fort and defence, strong places that had cost years of labour and a heavy expenditure. At about eleven a

deputation of Bloemfontein citizens arrived on the bluff and surrendered the town to Lord Roberts. At one the Commander-in-Chief made his official entry into the town at the head of Gordon's brigade (the 9th and 16th Lancers), while the rest of the cavalry division and Alderson's mounted infantry were detailed to form a circle of outposts round the town, four miles out.

Our only casualties during the day were one man wounded and one missing of the 9th Lancers. All credit is due to General French for his capture of Bloemfontein without much loss of life or heavy fighting. The sound strategical move of the Commander-in-Chief in approaching the town from the south-west confused and upset the plans of the enemy, who had fully intended to defend the town and had carefully prepared positions on the north and north-west; but reinforcements were arriving every hour, and had General French not moved his cavalry with the utmost promptitude and skill, and seized on a position which commanded the town, it may be assumed that the enemy, taking advantage of any hesitation or delay, would have drawn us into a serious engagement before the keys of Bloemfontein were handed over to Lord Roberts.

TEIN.


From Poplar Gr
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Line of Retreat
Kraal strongly held by enemy
To Baberspan
Farm ½ mile
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GENERAL FRENCH'S MARCH FROM KIMBERLEY TO BLOEMFONTEIN.

1. ENTRY OF THE CANADIANS INTO BLOEMFONTEIN.

2. VELDT MISTS IN THE EARLY MORNING (NEAR THABANCHU).

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ENTRY INTO BLOEMFONTEIN—THE HOWITZER BATTERY PASSES THE RAADZAAL.

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CHAPTER VII

THABANCHU

STIR and change, a reshuffling of military and political possibilities, a reversal of the outlook, an upheaval of the situation,—all seemed to come with the quick momentous fights, the forward rushes of our troops, and the entry of the Commander-in-Chief into Bloemfontein on March 13th. After months of vicissitude and dark fortune, the capture of the capital established a mastery of the British throughout the field of operations in Boer laager and British camp. Obstacles and difficulties that had paralysed and disheartened our forces were gone. Our task was simpler in all directions; a solid instalment of victory had been secured, further triumphs were foretold, and the rein given to unrestrained optimism.

Whatever the course of after events, the hopeful anticipations and rejoicings of the moment were natural and pardonable.

The commandos that had converged upon Paardeberg, striving for the release of Cronje, had been foiled in their attempt, and had in turn been driven back by the hurricane force Lord Roberts threw against them, and dismayed sought safety at Kroonstad. Their plight was noticed by the Boers at Colesberg, who, with more persistence than success, had been wasting time and resources in trying to prosecute an

invasion which the skilful strategy of our generals had rendered futile. With Lord Roberts at Bloemfontein, the would-be invaders, finding their lines of communication endangered, were obliged hurriedly to evacuate their elaborate entrenchments and fly north. Tidings of disaster disturbed the Boers in the fastnesses of Stormberg; and the imperious yet wary Olivier, perceiving that his brief authority over British territory was ended, hurried across the Orange River and, skirting the borders of hostile Basutoland, made for the rich uplands of the Ladybrand district, where natural strongholds and fertile soil offered a less precarious and more generous refuge.

Not only did the British operations in the north free the colony from invasion, but many sturdy burghers, believing that the struggle had gone against them, dropped out of the ranks of the retreating commandos as they came within hail of their homesteads, and exchanged the rifle for the more peaceful implements of husbandry. This acquiescence in the new order of things became general over the south and south-eastern parts of the Orange Free State; clear for the time of Republican forces, the inhabitants seemed ready to settle down quietly, and gave no more evidence of hostility to their conquerors.

The British auguries were good; the rear of our army was unthreatened, and ahead was only a discomfited foe in lessened numbers. The policy adopted for dealing with the new situation may be summed up in two words, *preparation* and *proclamation*. The first was designed to hasten a victorious close seemingly already in view, while the latter was intended to bring order to the recovered or conquered territories, and gradually to strengthen and widen our rule.

No fresh military enterprise on any scale was contemplated till such positions as were necessary to the safety of the troops encamped about Bloemfontein could be secured, and the lines of communication protected. In the meantime the army could rest and refit, and stores enough for a further advance would gradually accumulate by means of the limited carrying capacity of the railway. Only in one instance was this policy departed from.

Two days after his entry into Bloemfontein, Lord Roberts decided that General French with a mixed force of cavalry and mounted infantry should proceed to occupy the Bloemfontein waterworks 21 miles east of the capital, and, after leaving there two companies of mounted infantry, continue his advance with a small flying column to Thabanchu. On his way he was to distribute conciliatory proclamations, ascertain the feeling of the inhabitants, and gauge the general situation. Thabanchu was to be held as an outpost station. The smallness of the force detailed is sufficient evidence of the hopeful spirit prevailing, since obviously no serious resistance from the enemy was anticipated. The waterworks and Thabanchu were occupied without opposition, and General French being personally required at the capital to supervise the re-fitting and remounting of the cavalry for the main advance, returned there from Thabanchu leaving Broadwood in command of the force. No trace of the enemy could be detected at Thabanchu, but Colonel Pilcher, pushing a reconnaissance with a small party of men along the Wepener-Ladybrand road, observed a considerable body hurrying northwards. This was Olivier's commando coming from the Stormberg. Too weak in numbers to interfere with their retreat, and powerless

to inflict any damage, he cautiously followed in their wake as far as Ladybrand. Olivier become aware of his neighbourhood, and taking advantage of the slenderness of Pilcher's force, decided to drive him back. Pilcher was forced to retire, and closely followed by an overwhelming body of the enemy, fell back on Thabanchu. Even this position, it soon became evident, was not to be held against the large bodies of Boers who were now swooping down upon it. Thabanchu, commanded by precipitous hills, would be a difficult place to defend even with a big force of infantry, and certainly could not be held by a mere outpost of mounted troops. Broadwood quickly found himself obliged to withdraw, and misfortune befell him at Sannah's Post. A few days before this reverse, when Pilcher was reconnoitring towards Ladybrand, a like reconnaissance was carried out by a small force of cavalry, which, operating to the north of Bloemfontein, beyond Glen and Karree sidings, succeeded in entering Brandfort, then in the hands of the enemy. The experience was analogous in every respect. The Boers facing round upon the invaders, forced them to retire beyond Karree, and themselves occupied the hills which lie athwart the railway at that point. Two days before the reverse of Sannah's Post, General Tucker, supported by General French, who had been hurried north with a force of cavalry on his return from Thabanchu, fought the action at Karree, a successful though unsatisfactory engagement. Though the retirement of our forces before the Boer advance at two points widely separated naturally emboldened and encouraged the enemy, one is hardly justified in assuming that these incidents, relatively trivial, were in themselves the cause or explanation of the descent of the Boer com-

mandos into the southern districts of the Free State, which they had just before hastily evacuated. Other circumstances had evidently determined a concerted movement to the south, of which the Brandfort and Ladybrand episodes were but the preluding signals. Apart from Olivier's advance on Thabanchu and the occupation of Karree, the presence of Commandants Piet de Wet, Andreas Cronje, Wessels, Frohneman, Theron, Van de Merve, and Christian de Wet with their troops at carefully selected strategical points along the Modder River, may be evidence enough that a well-thought-out plan of campaign was in process of execution.

The long delay of our army at Bloemfontein, necessary but unfortunate, had enabled the enemy to recover from the effects of the disaster at Paardeberg. Accurately informed, moreover, of our doings, and gauging the difficulties of transport and the lack of remounts and supplies which stood in the way of an early advance, they were not long in concluding that their best course was to assume the tactical offensive while strategically acting on the defensive. After successfully ambushing Broadwood they swept down upon and captured a detachment of General Gatacre's force at Reddersberg. Continuing their progress they re-occupied Dewetsdorp, and moving east towards Wepener encountered an advanced detachment of 1,600 Colonials, belonging to Brabant's force, under Dalgety, who withdrew to Jammersberg Drift, three miles westward of Wepener, where they were surrounded. It was a party of Colonials, whom the Boers specially covet, and no effort was spared to compel surrender. How gallantly the position was held by Dalgety till the arrival of relief is a matter of history. Besides the besiegers

of Wepener, two considerable Boer forces were thrown forward, one facing Bloemfontein, and the other south-west towards the main line of rail from the south, so as to screen the besieging commandos and at the same time resist any attempted relief. Dalgety was invested by 6,000 men with 10 guns. In all about 10,000 Boers went south to take part in this renewed campaign. The piece of country where the enemy had concentrated was bounded on the west by a railway line held by us, on the south by the Orange River over which our columns, recently augmented by the 5th brigade from Natal, were hastening up to the relief, and on the east by the Basutoland border, watched by the warlike natives determined to resist any encroachment on their lands; the line from Bloemfontein by Thabanchu to Ladybrand, a distance of some 50 miles, being alone unoccupied, an unconnected aperture of certain outlet to the enemy in the south.

Here then, surely, was the opportunity for a strategical combination,—to throw a chain across from Bloemfontein to the mountains of the Drakensberg beyond Ladybrand, to withhold the Boer outgoing north, our columns to gather round, and close in fast upon the commandos thrown back into that loop of country against the Basuto border; in short some plan of envelopment similar to that which resulted in Cronje's downfall. But events shaped otherwise. Dalgety's relief, imperative though it was, came as a divergence, for Lord Roberts, whatever value he might attach to this new side-campaign of the Boers, was resolved that no minor operations, however important in themselves, should deter him from his set purpose to advance in strength through the northern portion of the Orange Free State to Johannesburg, with

Pretoria for his main objective. This policy of the snow-plough, driving narrow furrows instead of wide, will occasion much controversy, when the history of the war can be dealt with as a whole. In fact, certain operations were under military consideration which, in their effect, would have made the strong contingents of the Boer army, which took part in the southern movement, fit the strategical objective, and forced them into such a position that they must either fight or surrender. It was felt that, unless a decisive battle could be fought, or a large body of the enemy, as in Cronje's case, compelled to surrender before Pretoria was reached, the Boer commandos would still have to be dealt with in circumstances much more unfavourable to us than when our main army was concentrated at Bloemfontein with only 150 miles of communication to defend instead of nearly 400. The development of this view provided for the occupation of the rich granaries of the Ladybrand district, the securing of its natural strongholds, and the re-occupation of the Bloemfontein waterworks, which, after the enteric epidemic in the early part of 1896, had been specially built to allow the closing of the local fever-reeking wells that had indeed fallen into disuse until re-opened for our troops. The plan was based upon a judicious distribution of the forces available at Bloemfontein, a large part of which was detached towards Wepener; the co-operation of the troops coming from the south-west, south, and south-east; and the possible assistance of part of General Buller's force. Whatever the reasons which at that moment may have prevented the acceptance of such a scheme, the sequel has proved the correctness of its inductions. For the moment all efforts were directed solely to the relief of Dalgety's force at Jammersberg Drift; all instructions to the

troops employed very clearly show that this alone was the object aimed at. Brabant and his Colonial troops, and the 5th brigade under General Hart advanced from Aliwal North direct to Wepener; General Sir Leslie Rundle with the 8th division moved from the railway line at Edenburg to Dewetsdorp, and was supported by General Sir Herbert Chermside, meaning to break through the enemy's line which blocked the advance to Wepener. Another force, consisting of General Pole-Carew's division and a cavalry force, the whole under the command of General French, converged on the same point, with orders to push on to the relief of Wepener. With the exit north assured to them the enemy were able to continue the siege, till our approach became imminent, and, when too hard pressed and pushed back by our combined forces, they needed only to raise it and retire in safety on Thabanchu and Ladybrand, from whence they would have to be dislodged by a new series of operations. A glance at the map will make this apparent. And so it happened; the Boers, taking warning in time, retired northwards unhindered, and Wepener was relieved. Had it been only intended to oust the enemy from their positions this object was signally achieved, and the criticism that has arraigned the method of these operations falls to pieces. Some say that General French should have cut off the enemy, or caused them serious damage in their retirement; but a fuller knowledge of the circumstances, and a careful investigation of the plans and dispositions, will easily disprove the imputation of faulty execution or a poor zeal. To have prevented the enemy's retirement would have implied operations which clearly were never contemplated, and indeed would have necessitated an entirely different strategical distribution of forces.

And now the worn cavalry, after months of work and effort, were to enter energetically into another opening phase of the campaign. After a series of incessant operations calling for the fullest strain of careful calculation and hard physical exertion, inflicting a signal defeat on the Boers outside Ladysmith, holding and wearing them for many weeks at Colesberg, charging through their midst into Kimberley, by Paardeberg, Poplar Grove, and Abraham's Kraal through to Bloemfontein, General French, with his willing Staff and devoted troops, was launched into another hard piece of responsible campaigning, the seven weeks' task of clearing the eastern corner of the Free State.

On March 18th the cavalry was opening the country to Thabanchu with an arm out to Ladybrand; on the 29th it was engaged at Karree, north-east of Bloemfontein; on the 30th it was round the waterworks; on April 22nd it was at the relief of Wepener, fighting at Leeuwkop, and causing the Dewetsdorp Boers, who were screening the position at Wepener, to fall away in retreat. It was in action on April 24th at Roodekop, outside Dewetsdorp on the 25th, hurrying to reinforce Ian Hamilton at Thabanchu on the 26th. On the 28th General French, assisted by General Ian Hamilton's division, drove the Boers from their positions at Thabanchu, and a few days later he was in support of Hamilton at Houtnek, and rendered useful service in routing the Boers.

What follows will supply the details of the narrative I have here given in outline.

In pursuance of the general policy indicated, Lord Roberts made it his first concern to safeguard the water-supply of Bloemfontein, and to cultivate a

friendly understanding with the inhabitants of the surrounding districts. To this end General French on March 15th despatched three companies of Colonel Alderson's mounted infantry to protect the water-works, situated on the Modder River 21 miles east of the capital; while such forces as were available he ordered to proceed further in the same direction, to occupy Thabanchu as an outpost-station, and to scatter on the way the Commander-in-Chief's messages of conciliation.

The flying column consisted of the Household Cavalry and the 10th Hussars, under General Broadwood, two batteries (Q. and U.) of horse-artillery, Alderson's mounted infantry and one battalion of Martyr's. They were required to concentrate by the morning of the 18th at Springfield eight miles south-east of Bloemfontein, the rest of the cavalry being retained at Headquarters in charge of General Gordon.

The column left Springfield on the afternoon of the 18th under the command of General French himself. Bad weather was experienced at the outset, and the force was caught in a torrent of rain before reaching the Bosmanskop ridge, where a halt was made after a little over two hours' march. In the evening information was received that 40 of the enemy were at Thabanchu, and that a big force was expected there from the south; the dispositions for the following day were therefore so made as to ensure the safety of the baggage and supply columns in case of attack on the line of march. When the advance was resumed next morning, rain continued to pour down pitilessly, and the track was in a sodden and clodded condition, but the cavalry and transport persevered on their cheerless way, until the Modder was

crossed. About six miles east of the stream, near Cameron's farm, a halt was called at two in the afternoon, and it was decided to bivouac there for the night. However welcome the rest might be, there was little hope of comfort, the weather being cold and wet, with no fire or shelter procurable.

The march was continued at nine the next day (March 20th), one reconnoitring squadron ahead. No opposition was met with beyond a collision between a flanking patrol of the 10th Hussars and a small party of Boers three miles south-east of Israel Poort; and nothing more was seen of the enemy save a few insignificant groups in the far distance on the Dewetsdorp road. At one o'clock the destination was reached, and the landdrost of Thabanchu came out to meet General French. The tiny village, consisting of a few hundred unpretentious houses, lies against two hills on the north, and three miles to the east towers above them the horse-shoe shaped mountain of Thabanchu with its crowding of abrupt precipices. From the village to the summit is about four miles. A depression on the north-east, known as the Nek, marks the road from Bloemfontein to Ladybrand, and just below runs the main road from Dewetsdorp to Winburg.

A force of between 3,000 and 4,000 Boers being reported in retreat on the Wepener-Ladybrand road, General French despatched one squadron of the 10th Hussars, two companies of mounted infantry, and one machine-gun, under Colonel Pilcher, along the Bloemfontein-Ladybrand road to destroy the enemy's supplies at Newberry's flour-mills, a point 21 miles east of Thabanchu and 18 miles from Ladybrand, where the Leeuw River, flowing south to join the Caledon River, cuts through the road. Recon-

naissances sent out to the south-east were to report any movement of the enemy on the Wepener-Ladybrand road, especially towards Comissie Poort six miles ahead, where the road crosses a nek before leading to the Bloemfontein-Thabanchu road.

Colonel Pilcher started at six in the morning on his 25 mile march to the south-east, reaching his destination at Newberry mills by four in the afternoon, and at once taking up a defensive position on a kopje. He lost no time in obtaining information, and was soon able to send news that Commandant Grobelaar, of Colesberg fame, was that day in Ladybrand, and that the main body of the enemy, on its way to Clocolan, was protected by a flank guard at Modderpoort eight miles north of Ladybrand. Further intelligence of the close approach of the enemy led Pilcher to conclude that an attack on his detachment next morning was in contemplation, and in consequence he asked for reinforcements, which were sent off at dawn.

This supporting force was composed of one squadron of cavalry, two companies of mounted infantry, and one battery of horse-artillery under Colonel Alderson. accompanied by Colonel Haig and Major Lawrence. Their instructions were to proceed 10 or 12 miles eastward, reconnoitring widely to prevent surprise, and to render aid to Colonel Pilcher in the event of his having found it necessary to withdraw, which he was instructed to do should the enemy make any attempt to cut him off, although this, in the opinion of General French, was unlikely owing to the open nature of the country.

Happily, the morning which brought him news of the support on its way also brought him relief from any probability of attack, for soon after sunrise Pilcher was able to open heliographic communication with Sir

Godfrey Lagdon, watching the movements of the Boers from the Basutoland hills, by which he learnt that Grobelaar, with some 8,000 Boers, 18 guns, and 600 wagons, was trekking northward, and that a portion of his transport was at that moment behind a large hill called Mabulah, about seven miles to the south-east, moving towards Comissie Poort.

Alderson, on reaching Thabanchu Nek on the edge of the open country which stretches down to the mills, learned by heliograph from Pilcher that none of the enemy was in sight; he waited, however, on the nek until noon, and finding the situation then unchanged returned to camp, leaving a post to keep open communication.

General French, being urgently needed at Bloemfontein to superintend the mounting of the cavalry division, had left Thabanchu with his Staff on April 25th, delegating the local command of all troops to General Broadwood. Taking with him two companies of mounted infantry as escort, French reached the waterworks after a three hours' ride, and was at the capital again by noon of the next day.

Colonel Pilcher, hearing that Ladybrand was defended by only 20 town guards and 10 men withdrawn from Clocolan, all likely to give in at the first shot fired, determined to seize the town. Leaving 100 men to garrison the mills he started early on March 24th, with some 30 men of the 10th Hussars and about 70 mounted infantry, to cross the Platberg by a road that for four miles is almost a defile. At the top the ground is open for a few miles, till at the further edge of the plateau the hill drops steeply to the town of Ladybrand at its foot. The mounted infantry and the machine gun detachment of the 10th Hussars remained at the top of the hill, fortunately as it turned

out, while the rest of the Hussars went on, entered the town and seized the landdrost, the field-cornet, and the stores, prison, and post-office. Colonel Pilcher had not been there more than half-an-hour and had just given orders to feed, in fact the nose-bags were already on, when a sergeant galloped down from the hill with the news that a large force of Boers was quickly nearing the town. The odds being largely in favour of the enemy, Colonel Pilcher sounded *the retire*, and, sending the landdrost and field-cornet on in front in a Cape cart belonging to a loyal Scotch farmer, galloped off up the steep and rocky road leading on to the Platberg, while the enemy galloped into the town at the other end.

The inhabitants, who had warmly welcomed the arrival of the British, turned upon them in their retirement, firing at them out of windows and gardens, to which some who had stayed hidden among rocks on the hillside added their share. Though the range was sometimes not more than 20 yards, the whole party, landdrost included, reached the top with only two men wounded and two taken prisoners. One other casualty was a Boer woman accidentally shot by her friends across the street.

The Boers had been making straight for the hill intending to cut off Pilcher in the town, but the Maxim knocked over five or six of them from 2,200 yards distance and made the rest sheer off. Numbering 1,500 in all they had divided into three bodies, one coming round on the right, the other on the left; the third made straight forward, but would not face the hill, and the two bodies trying to work round the flanks had far to go before they could get on to the plateau, all of which allowed Pilcher to retire at once when he had reached the top. A message by a galloper was sent to Major

Booth, who with some mounted infantry was protecting the left flank, to fall back slowly on the mills. The Platberg crossed, a kopje just beyond was held till Major Booth came up, when the retirement was continued to Leeuw River without further incident. The enemy must have been aware of our coming early in the morning, and sent at once to Clocolan, not more than three hours from Ladybrand, for assistance. On March 28th, Broadwood came over to Leeuw River and ordered a retirement on Thabanchu, which was reached the next morning in safety, in spite of a large body of Boers sighted to the north. From the entrance of the nek above Thabanchu distant guns were heard, which afterwards turned out to be Boers shelling the camp vacated at dawn and entering the mills.

At eleven o'clock on the same morning (March 28th), General Broadwood, warned by his outposts that the enemy in large masses were advancing on Thabanchu along the road by which Pilcher had returned, sent out 300 mounted infantry and a squadron of cavalry to strengthen the outposts in that direction. At the same time another Boer force was reported to be coming from the north, and three squadrons were despatched to reconnoitre and occupy a suitable position to await them. The situation was becoming serious. Broadwood's force was but slender, devoid of support, and threatened on at least two sides by overwhelming numbers of a mobile enemy. The position was promptly reported to Headquarters, and the necessity was foreshadowed of a retirement on Sannah's Post, where reinforcements would be more readily available. The officer commanding at Sannah's Post, who had that day ridden across to Thabanchu, was specially directed by Broadwood to carefully reconnoitre towards the north.

The situation had now become critical. At three o'clock in the afternoon the nek overlooking Thabanchu, only six miles off, was assailed by the Boers, and Broadwood saw that no time must be lost in getting his convoy away and effecting a general retirement. The convoy hastened off in charge of Pilcher with an escort of mounted infantry, and was instructed to proceed first to Israel's Poort, three miles to the rear, and to bivouac there. These instructions were superseded later on, and orders given for the retirement on the waterworks to continue, as the enemy's movements on the north had been more precisely ascertained. The waterworks were reached by eleven that night without any trace of the enemy being seen on the way. Careful precautions were taken against surprise, and by midnight Pilcher's command was settled down in bivouac to the left, or south, of the road and on the Bloemfontein side of the Modder River.

The pressure brought to bear upon Broadwood at Thabanchu Nek by the Boers from Ladybrand made it necessary that he should hold on all day; but at dark, the enemy retiring, he was thus enabled to withdraw his supports and guns.

Wearied as they were by their prolonged march, and the strain of ten hours' active resistance to attack, the little force[1] set out again at nine, on a night march towards Bloemfontein. The mounted infantry marched in rear of the column, Alderson protecting his own rear by the Burma contingent. The night was marked by no incident of any kind which could have led to the suspicion that the column was being followed by the enemy, as after-events would

[1] Q. and U. Batteries of the Royal Horse-Artillery, Household Cavalry, 160 men, 10th Hussars, 160, Alderson's Mounted Infantry, 800.

show. The Modder River was reached in safety and without interference, and the Waterworks Drift was crossed at four in the morning. About 600 yards from the river the column went into bivouac at a point to the right of the convoy; their bivouac extending into the outposts already placed by Pilcher, Alderson ordered outposts further afield.

The force straightway fell asleep from sheer exhaustion; but their rest was destined to be short. The day had hardly broken when shells came crashing into their midst from hills beyond the Modder River, some 5,000 to 7,000 yards to the east. The quiet camp was at once transformed into a scene of wild bustle and commotion. On the first alarm Broadwood was up and on the alert to take in the situation. Before retiring to rest he had sent instructions for patrols to reconnoitre the country for 10 miles east and south and well to the north; and another patrol of four men had gone at sunset to Bosmanskop with orders to return early on the following morning and meet him at the waterworks. The patrol that had reconnoitred towards Waterval Drift at daybreak, reported the north flank clear; of the other, although the hour named for their return had passed, nothing was seen or heard. An officer from the eastern patrol hastened back across the river drift and galloped up to General Broadwood to report having been fired on a short distance back, which sufficiently indicated the nearness of the enemy on that side. This was the firing that had just been heard in camp at about half-past five; but those whom it roused from sleep at first believed it to be a mere sniping incident, common enough on patrol duty. What it foreboded they were soon to learn, for already out on the Thabanchu road, a few miles off they could

plainly discern the patrol tearing back in hot haste between the hills east of the drift.

The camp was scarcely yet astir, but for a few men lighting mess-fires and preparing breakfast. In less than 10 minutes four Boer guns had opened an angry fire from the hills north of the Thabanchu road. The range, at first short, was soon picked up, and the shells at quick intervals began to break in among the outspanned baggage close to Alderson's bivouac; but failing to explode they did little damage. All his mounted troops were instantly ordered to saddle and the cavalry instructed to stand to their horses, which had been only linked. Outranged by the enemy's guns, our 12-pounders could do nothing to keep down their fire, and the withdrawal of the baggage-column out of danger became a first consideration. As the enemy's rifle and shell fire had so far proved almost harmless, a position of considerable strength might have been created by occupying the water-worn and scrub-covered banks of the Modder River till the arrival of reinforcements. But the reported sudden appearance of 300 mounted Boers galloping along the north bank of the Modder and rapidly heading in the direction of Bosmanskop finally decided Broadwood to abandon all idea of acting on the defensive and to seek safety in the retirement of his force. A nearly straight road leads from the waterworks west towards Bosmanskop and Bloemfontein. Except for slight undulations the road runs over level ground for about a mile and a half, until it crosses the Koornspruit Drift and ascends a slight ridge overlooking the bushy banks of the sluggish watercourse. The intervening plain offers no natural cover, and but for a half finished section of a railway embankment running parallel to

the road on the south and extending to the Koornspruit, and some iron houses marking the site of Sannah's Post station, opportunities for defence did not exist. This, the main way to Bosmanskop, was the route chosen for the retirement, and the order was given for the baggage to be off in the direction of Bosmanskop with all despatch. That post was already held by a small body of mounted infantry, but to make the first move secure U. battery and Roberts's Horse were ordered to push ahead and reinforce the position.

By this time the excitement in the bivouac had grown intense. Shells continued to fall among the baggage, and Boer riflemen, who had slipped down to the drift, were adding to the annoyance and pressure. The native drivers, flying pell-mell, tumbled to their teams, hitched them up, and made a wide bolt to westward. Before U. battery and Roberts's Horse received their orders and could be off and away, the foremost wagons, driven at a racing pace, were well ahead, and could not be overtaken by the troop detailed as advanced guard. Alderson, assuming that his brigade would again have to act as rearguard, although no specific instructions had yet reached him to that effect, disposed his command so as to cover the baggage, and pushed in a company or two towards the Modder Drift to obstruct any attempt to cross and harass the retreat. In the meantime U. and Q. batteries, who had taken only 10 minutes to harness and be off, were keeping on the right of the convoy, while Roberts's Horse were on their left front, the relative positions occupied during the bivouac.

The two batteries moved on in line to the crossing of the Koornspruit, followed about 10 minutes later by

the cavalry. Leaving the bivouac, they passed at the outset over ground which dips slightly towards a small spruit, and at this point the more important Koornspruit further on is screened from view. The ground then rises again gently to the cluster of tin houses belonging to the railway, and known as Sannah's Post, separated from the Koornspruit by 1,100 yards of dead flat. When abreast of the tin buildings U. battery pushed ahead of Q. battery, which advanced at a walking pace, with Major Hornby 100 yards in front.

Roberts's Horse on the left of the convoy was moving on fast: when within a short distance from Koornspruit Drift a check on the convoy attracted their notice; but a stuck wagon was an ordinary and nearly daily occurrence on the march, which need cause no special uneasiness. Slight movements seemed to indicate slow progress in disentanglement from the pear-shaped block occasioned by a momentary jam, and for all that appeared, everything was going well. U. battery on the right, formed up in battery column with the leading guns close to the drift, had come to a standstill. Major Hornby, 300 yards behind, was following with Q. battery, unconscious of evil ahead. So far nothing had occurred to indicate the near presence of misfortune, though beyond the drift Burnham, the American scout, was making frantic but unavailing efforts to warn our men before it was too late. As Roberts's Horse neared the edge of the banks a perplexing sight met their eyes. Below them the concealed Boers were intermixed with our wagons and men, who had been entrapped in an ambush audaciously planned and faultlessly executed. A deadly volley from the river into the midst of Roberts's Horse on the left, and the danger had

signalled itself. Another staggering outburst of Mauser fire at close range on the right, and down went gunners and horses of U. battery, while beyond these one of the teams of Q. battery, mad with fright, stampeded wildly out of reach. This bullet-raked zone of destruction was no place for mounted troops, and those of Roberts's Horse who were unwounded retired out of range, their example being followed by Colonel Fisher's cavalry, who fell back towards the tin huts. Major Hornby, with admirable coolness, drew out his guns in columns of subdivision, and, giving the order to left wheel, galloped his remaining guns towards safety. But the Boer aim was true and destructive. Riddled with bullets three horses of the wagon abreast of the outer gun collapsed in a heap, and the fourth lay helpless with a broken back; an instant later and the gun itself met its fate. Knocked off their legs, a leader and a wheeler sank dead and over went the gun, left a prey to the enemy. Losing so heavily in the retirement, Hornby was obliged to unlimber some 900 yards away and go into action, his shells dropping to right and left of the convoy, and beyond.

The foreground on the river was now a distracting scene of confusion, with horses out of control, a stampeding team galloping into the ranks of the 10th Hussars, mules breaking away, and natives flying for their lives. U. battery, many men, and the convoy were lost; instant and well-judged action could alone save the rest of the force. Broadwood met the situation cool and collected. Through the remorseless fire of the Boers he detected that the firing line did not extend more than 350 yards to the south of the drift, and that the ground to his left, between the tin huts and the water's edge, remained an open

gap. On this circumstance he based his operations. The best means of securing the exit was to occupy a position higher up stream and gradually to work down. He despatched his Brigade-Major Brand with a message to Colonel Fisher, who was nearing the tin tenements, instructing him to send the Household Cavalry to a suitable point from which they could work down the spruit and check any attempt of the Boers to extend their lines further south. A company of mounted infantry was to draw out on the left of the Household Cavalry along the rise overlooking the spruit, while Fisher, with the 10th Hussars, by swinging round still further on the left of the mounted infantry, was to operate directly against the rear of the enemy engaged in the ambush.

Having seen the forces off, and to leave no doubt as to his wishes, Broadwood himself followed up the cavalry beyond the drift, and after explaining the direction they were to take, rode across to the guns and pointed out precisely the line of retirement they were to adopt, so soon as they could get clear. If the movement of the cavalry was carried out with quickness, the retreat of the rest of the force could be considerably aided, and there might be hope that the guns of U. battery, now at the mercy of the enemy, with the convoy and our captured men, would even yet be saved, and the situation retrieved at the eleventh hour. Encouraged by the success which had attended their strategy, the Boers in the spruit, now augmented to 1,500, as well as those who had followed the retiring force from Thabanchu, were boldly closing in to complete their victory. The situation was critical in the extreme, and but for the spirit and courage of Alderson's mounted infantry, and for Hornby's guns, all would have been lost. With the first rattle of

musketry Alderson had grasped the emergency, and quickly made the dispositions which he saw the imminence of danger would soon demand. Q. battery was left in action well within the range of the Boer rifles. Projecting his strongest unit, the Burma Mounted Infantry, at a gallop to a point beyond the tin huts, he assigned to them the duty of guarding the right flank of the retirement. Ranging themselves close to the right and left of the guns, they covered both them and the withdrawing cavalry, and so thwarted the endeavours of the enemy to make a sortie from their lair in the spruit. The rest of his force, which consisted of Pilcher's and Amphlett's mounted infantry, was drawn up in a wide semicircle, facing backwards towards the river and the advancing masses of the enemy.

The small force engaged on our side was now being attacked from north-east and west, and it was doubtful how long the south would be open. A Boer bullet or a pilgrimage to Pretoria seemed to many the sole outcome of the day. But Alderson, knowing that his men could be relied on, was steadfastly carrying out Broadwood's instructions to resist the advancing Boers, and not recede so long as it was safe to stand. His task was to keep down the enemy's fire and free his guns so soon as the turning movement of the cavalry should have checked the Boer musketry in the spruit. Hornby's guns were then to retire round the pivot formed by the mounted infantry in the spruit, and make for Bosmanskop, to be followed by the remainder of the force.

Colonel Alderson, stubbornly holding his ground, was watching his opportunity. When the stream of men and animals, escaping in breathless haste from the snare laid for them, began to dwindle, he summoned

the guns from the vicinity of the tin buildings. Their withdrawal from this position was the signal for another of the highly-wrought scenes in the drama of that eventful day. Reduced to 10 men (seven gunners, one sergeant, one corporal, and a bombadier), and himself the sole officer left with the battery, Major Hornby had to call for volunteers to rescue the guns. The appeal was responded to by Captain Humphreys, who was close by, by Lieutenant Stirling (2nd Essex), Burma Mounted Infantry, by Lieutenant Maxwell (18th Bengal Lancers), attached to Roberts's Horse; and a number of privates showed equal alacrity in lending help. Five men by themselves, working with a will, managed to drag the two guns on the left a distance of 50 yards to a point behind the station building, and the two on the outside were hauled by 10 non-commissioned officers and gunners 100 yards to the shelter of a ramp close up the line; the limbers also had to be brought up by manual effort.

Singling out the middle gun the Boers poured on it an unmeasured fire, till it seemed as if nothing could live under such a fury of shell and bullet. The five dauntless men resumed the attempt at rescue by hand, but their strength was exhausted, and they had to turn to the horses that were standing in poor shelter behind a tin shed at the station. Four of the animals were brought forward in pairs only to be shot down; another pair met the same fate. A gunner went out with each pair to hook in, while the driver held the horses. It was observed that as the men emerged from the shelter of the buildings they bent their heads towards the direction from which the bullets were coming, as if they were withstanding a storm of hail. There had been 87 horses under the shelter of the shed; 85 were killed or disabled, and upon the remaining two

animals depended the fate of the guns. Several bullets dropped hard by these two animals throwing up dust to their middles, but the whizzing of the lead scarcely seemed to frighten them. They were with the utmost haste hitched up to the limber, and Lieutenant Stirling proceeded to back them to the gun. The short space of a single yard separated the trail from the limber-hook: one instant more and they would have plunged forward bearing the gun away into safety; but it was not to be. A few Boer muzzles with unerring aim snatched away the success that seemed so nearly assured and so richly deserved. Both horses were shot through the eyes and dropped dead; Driver Glosach was wounded at the same moment, and the last gun stood hopelessly derelict. All means of rescue had been exhausted, and the gun must be abandoned.

The general retirement was now to be further proceeded with. The guns which had been extricated were withdrawn through the lines of the mounted infantry, and the whole brigade was led back by Alderson to a new position further south of the first. As they moved, one line was passed through the other, and parties were sent out from the reserve, which was kept as big as possible, to the flanks. Valuable assistance on the flanks was about this time rendered by the squadron of Household Cavalry, which had been sent down to the river-bed as already mentioned. The position now taken up covered the guns which had already reached a point near Koornspruit.

The enemy, held at bay, had not been able after all to turn our left, and our one way of escape was thus kept open. Even now they refrained from pushing an advance. The gallant defenders of the guns succeeded in continuing their retirement, still greatly

harassed, no doubt, but fortunately without suffering serious loss. This was the more satisfactory, because our retirement had much emboldened the Boers, who came galloping on behind, some dismounting to shoot, and others shooting from off their horses. Many of our men who had gone through much active service in the war admit that they never saw the enemy so bold before.

Luckily a practicable crossing over the Koornspruit was hit upon at a point about three miles from the fatal drift. The passage was a bad one, but its difficulties were surmounted, and the guns got over in safety. The brigade gradually crossed, reforming as they went along on the other side of the drift, and the Boers did not follow them far beyond the spruit. At about a quarter past eleven they were out of danger and on their way to Bosmanskop. As for the men and for U. battery, entangled in the zone swept by the bullets from the river ambush, to communicate with or support them from the lines of the mounted infantry was impossible, and they had to be left to their fate.

The cavalry, at about seven in the morning, had crossed to the south of the Koornspruit by the drift which the mounted infantry used later in the day. Rapidity of movement could alone bring success. The 10th Hussars made a wide detour to within a few miles of Bosmanskop, so as to approach the spruit concealed, and well to the rear. Had they kept closer in to the river-bed along the rising ground, parallel with it, their presence might have altered matters; but hindered at the beginning of their movement by the troublesome character of the drift, the cavalry had lost precious time. When, in the course of their detour, they were within a few miles of Bosmans-

kop, they met a detachment of Martyr's mounted infantry. Fisher having explained to them the nature of the task in hand, it was agreed that the two forces should combine in the movement towards the elevation overlooking and running parallel to the Koornspruit main drift, in rear of the Boers. Martyr's men took to the left, and the cavalry kept on the right. As the former were heading up the slope, they reported being heavily fired upon from the north, and checked in their advance. While Fisher was working up on the right, he received a message from Broadwood describing the situation, with the unwelcome news that now it was too late to do any good, and ordering him to retire on Bosmanskop. This was about one o'clock, by which time Broadwood and Alderson's mounted infantry were well on their way to that post, and they arrived there shortly after.

It was not until after he had passed over the Koornspruit at the lower drift, that Broadwood received the first news of the reinforcements which, as already mentioned, he had been hoping for. An officer from Sir Henry Colvile reached him about noon with the information that the 9th division, which had that morning gone out from Bloemfontein to strengthen him and support his retirement, was then at Bosmanskop; but later on he learned that Sir Henry was making a flank movement, and proceeding north-east towards Waterval Drift. With this intelligence abandoning all hope of recapturing the lost guns by a direct attack, Broadwood saw nothing for it but to order his units to their respective camps near Bloemfontein, which were reached an hour before midnight. They arrived in an exhausted condition; their entire baggage had been lost, they had been destitute of provisions throughout the day, and many

of them indeed had gone without any food at all since the previous morning or afternoon.

Special honour is due to the company of the first brigade of mounted infantry which formed part of the waterworks' garrison, and had been sent out early in the morning on a reconnaissance northward to a kopje near the confluence of the Koornspruit and the Modder River. Here they were surrounded by the Boers, but, making a gallant defence under Captain N. R. Radcliffe, they held out tenaciously, though exposed to a severe and continuous shell fire, until they were relieved in the afternoon by Henry's regiment of mounted infantry which Broadwood sent out to their assistance from Bosmanskop. Too much praise cannot be bestowed upon them for the bravery of their unyielding resistance.

But what had befallen the unfortunate men of whom the Boers had made prisoners? It appears that after those who had rushed into the ambush were deprived of their rifles by the Boers stationed in the spruit, they were left unguarded for an hour or more, while their captors joined in the attack upon the mounted infantry and the guns. Escape was attempted, as eyewitnesses testify, but the only exit from the trap in which they were caught was across the bullet-swept zone, and a dash for liberty would have meant almost certain death. Immediately the fire on the guns had ceased, the Boers emerged from the bed of the river and added to their haul of captures. A long march lay before the prisoners. At four in the afternoon a halt was made behind some kopjes, seemingly those which curve round the eastern bank of the Modder River towards the waterworks. Here the names of the men and of their regiments were taken down by the Boers, and on they went again a little way.

Reaching some wagons, which turned out to be our own, they bivouacked for the night, when General De Wet in person came up and addressed them. He regretted that he had no food to offer them, but there stood their wagons from which they could help themselves to anything they could find; three more days on the road, he added, would bring them to their destination. The journey proved longer and very toilsome. From three in the morning they marched until eight, when they halted for two hours. The next stage lasted from 10 till two, and resuming at four they plodded on until 10 at night. At last in soaking rain, footsore, and hungry, for the food had given out, they reached Winburg and took the train for Pretoria, to be eventually released at Waterval on the capture of Pretoria. The Boers had taken many of our sick prisoners, also details of the Household Cavalry, mounted infantry, and 18 dismounted men of the 10th Hussars, who were with the wagons. Men and guns were marched off together, the guns being dragged by chance horses which were harnessed to them and led by the Boers. About 30 mounted Boers served as escort. Our wounded were left behind, and were brought in next day by Colonel Porter.

Our losses in the engagement were 33 officers and 525 rank and file killed, wounded, and missing; of these four officers and 12 men were killed. The mounted infantry bore a large share of the casualties, they alone accounting for a return showing 16 officers and 221 men of a total force of about 1,000 strong. As for Q. battery, out of a total of about 100 gunners and drivers no less than four men were killed, four officers and 34 men wounded, and eight missing.

A review of the short and tragic history of the

column which but a fortnight before had left Bloemfontein for Thabanchu, and a closer examination into the circumstances which contributed to the serious reverse at Sannah's Post will disclose several points which call for elucidation.

The optimism prevailing at Headquarters, which has already been referred to, is signally shown by the inadequate strength of the column for the work assigned to it. Although Broadwood, after a first preliminary warning, had, a few hours later, communicated to the Chief of the Staff his definite decision to retire to Sannah's Post within supporting distance of Bloemfontein, it was not until nearly 24 hours afterwards, when the action had in fact been fought and lost, that Broadwood got the first intimation of Colvile's arrival with reinforcements at Bosmanskop only 15 miles from Bloemfontein. The news of the advance of the enemy in large numbers from Ladybrand was known at Headquarters; but no imminent danger to Broadwood's retirement was apparently foreseen, or some difficulty must have stood in the way of sending the reinforcements. It was not the pressure at Ladybrand that worked the misfortune, but De Wet and his 1,800 followers with Nordenfeldts and Maxims, who coming from Brandfort stopped at Vrede, half-way between Brandfort and Thabanchu, and hearing of the retirement of Broadwood's convoy on Bloemfontein dropped across by night to the Koornspruit, where he and 600 men lay in ambush to entrap the convoy that was to be driven in upon him by his guns and the rest of his force from behind. It is clear that he must have eluded the notice of our Intelligence Department, or they would have taken steps to cover Broadwood by a move to intercept and engage De Wet and his force. As it fell out, Broadwood, thrown upon his

own resources, was obliged to extricate his column unaided. The baggage and his force were admirably withdrawn from Thabanchu to the waterworks; so skilfully indeed was the retirement effected, that Christian De Wet, although aware of the position of the baggage, remained totally ignorant of the column's whereabouts until the dawn of the fateful day disclosed its presence to him. We have seen the dispositions made for reconnoitring the neighbourhood of the camp, and special mention has been made of the patrol sent to Bosmanskop, to whose remissness in not signalling the ambuscade Lord Roberts mainly attributes the serious mishap which followed. This patrol, which was sent out at sunset on the previous evening, had, unless captured or barred by the enemy, ample time to cover the distance to Bosmanskop and back to Sannah's Post before the hours of three and five on the following morning, the limit allowed for its return. Their failure to return was either overlooked in the confusion caused by the shelling of the camp in the early hours of the 31st, or sufficient importance was not attached to this circumstance, of itself very ominous, and, although theoretically a neglect in actual warfare, easily accounted for.

The narrative of the day's events tells that 300 Boer horsemen were seen galloping on the north bank of the Modder River, apparently towards Bosmanskop. The map will show that our mounted troops then at Sannah's Post, saddled and held in readiness to proceed to the reinforcement of the small garrison of Bosmanskop, had less distance to cover than they. It would have been better if the detachments had left at once, instead of waiting till the wagon-teams were ready to withdraw, with the result that the latter outdistanced them and hurried the force to disaster.

As stated, Broadwood had cleverly masked his intentions, and not till daybreak did De Wet become aware of his having joined the baggage-column. From what we know now of the Boer General, this new element, by increasing the risk and danger, would have increased also his determination. Reserving fire until his force from the east had driven the quarry into ambush, he made the best of a situation for which he was in great part prepared. Despite Broadwood's precautions in anticipation of a hazardous retreat, circumstances were in conspiracy against him and allowed him no quarter; but even so, the immediate origin of the disaster must be traced to the fact that the column was permitted to move before a proper advanced guard, with scouts in front and on either flank, had led the way. The final extrication of the force and the means employed were alike creditable to the ingenuity, calmness, and courage of General Broadwood.

Again, whether the reverse was due to a well conceived trap or a mere coincidence of fortuitous circumstances which played into the hands of De Wet, may best be answered by his own despatch sent to President Steyn on the day of the fight. It clearly shows that the arrival of the baggage-convoy at Sannah's Post was known to the Boer commanders assembling at the Modder River, and that De Wet and his men deliberately took up the position at Koornspruit Drift over which the convoy must pass, at four o'clock on the morning of the 31st, after having made a night-ride of three hours to achieve that end.

General French had gone from Thabanchu to Bloemfontein, but his stay there was short, for while the column from Thabanchu was working its way back,

his services were urgently required elsewhere. The Commander-in-Chief, desirous of attacking and driving a Boer force out of the hills it had occupied abreast of those overlooking Karree siding, about 15 miles north of Bloemfontein on the Brandfort road, required General Tucker's division and General French's remaining force for the purpose.

The road from Bloemfontein to Brandfort, a section of the main wagon-track to the north of the Free State, is intercepted at Karree siding by an irregular range of hills, dove-tailing into one another and of varying heights with diversified contours. The hills are strewn with boulders of rock and overgrown with bushy scrub densest in a maze of intersecting kloofs. As the design was to dislodge the enemy, General Tucker's division had orders to advance step by step from the south-east to the north-west, while the cavalry effected a circling movement on the west, and, the mounted infantry engaging in a similar proceeding to the east, should endeavour to envelope the enemy and cut off his line of retreat. General Tucker's division and Gordon's brigade were already encamped near the scene of operations; the remainder of the cavalry had to be brought from the neighbourhood of Bloemfontein.

On Wednesday morning, April 28th, the first brigade from Wessel's Farm, and the 12th Lancers and first brigade division horse-artillery from Bloemspruit, three miles east of Bloemfontein, were ordered out with two days' supplies to meet General French by five o'clock in the morning, at the Glen some 10 miles north of Bloemfontein; but owing to a delay in the arrival of Porter's brigade, and also of the 12th Lancers, the brigades, which were to have concentrated at a place called Roodeheuvel Hill at a

quarter to six on the following morning, did not effect a junction till seven. The dispositions for the combined operations of the infantry and mounted troops provided for Le Gallais's mounted infantry covering Tucker's right and crossing the ridge at a place near Nel's Drift, while Tucker's division advanced and seized the hills from south-east to north-west lying across the railway. The eastern chain consists of a long ridge and two separate hills standing shoulder to shoulder close to the railway on the left, with the country beyond thrown out in broad smooth folds. At daylight the cavalry were to make a wide turning to the west of Karree siding. Starting some two hours late, as we have seen, Porter's and Gordon's brigades, under cover of a slight heave of the country, moved on Kalkfontein due west of Karree siding, arriving there soon after ten. An advanced patrol, sent towards Alleman's Dam on the railway line to the north, reported that parties of Boers lying concealed in the bushes between Welgedacht and the railway had fired on them. The country beyond the railway to the west they found free of the enemy.

Soon after eleven the two brigades proceeded eastward on the north slope of the hills to clear the bushy country and the dry river-bed between Kalkfontein and the railway. By a little after noon they had reconnoitred and cleared the entire zone of trees as far as Welgedacht, well to the rear of a position which subsequently was shown to have been occupied by the enemy, though at the time not a sign of life betrayed their presence.

Meanwhile the infantry had been developing its advance, and at noon there was news from General Tucker's force that a body of 300 Boers and one gun had been driven off northward by the mounted infantry

on his right, that no other trace of the enemy could be detected, and that they hoped to be at the top of the hill in the course of an hour.

This information, combined with that supplied by his own reconnaissances, led General French to conclude that the Karree hills had been evacuated; and desirous of saving his horses as much as possible, he proceeded to concentrate his cavalry, which had spread out considerably, at the foot of the flat-topped Houtenbeck hill. Before two o'clock the concentration was interrupted by further news that the mounted infantry and the 14th brigade were engaging the enemy close to Karree siding on the east of the railway, and that General Tucker himself was attacking the outstanding hill just west of the railway.

On this the cavalry was at once set moving to the east again, and disturbed by this advance, about 50 Boers emerged from the slope between the Houtenbeck eminence and the two other hills near the railway. Davidson at once brought his guns into action on them at 2100 yards, and turning their direction sent them off at a gallop eastward.

Meanwhile Chermside's brigade, consisting of the Norfolks, Hampshires, Lincolns, and Scottish Borderers, supported by General Wavell's Cheshires, North Staffords, East Lancashires, and South Wales Borderers, were hotly engaging the Boers. General French's renewed advance was now detected by the enemy, and some 1500 to 2000 of them, fearing danger from the rear, were seen to decamp from the positions which had so successfully shielded them. Gordon's horse-artillery opened fire and drew a reply from two Boer guns on the other side of the railway. The 9th Lancers were ready to charge in pursuit, but observing that a number of Boers, evidently gauging their design,

had dismounted under cover to resist the advance, General French countermanded the attack. The Boers then rode off in hasty flight to the hills near Brandfort, though their guns continued to maintain a brisk fire. It was now five in the afternoon, and the horses of both the cavalry and artillery were unfit for more exertion. The enemy had been dislodged, and the immediate object achieved. Our losses for the day amounted to 75 of the infantry killed and wounded, and of the cavalry one man killed, one wounded, and three taken prisoners. Success had been attained, but the broad result was unsatisfactory, since the enemy, by the clever manner in which they had managed to elude the vigilance of the reconnoitring patrols, and even to confuse the judgment of General French, were able to escape with insignificant loss.

The positions vacated by the enemy were at once occupied by our infantry. It was decided to withdraw the cavalry division, and, passing through the gap by which the railway runs between the hills, it reached camp at Karree siding just as darkness set in. The support of the 12th Lancers, kept at Kalkfontein to cover the left flank of the infantry, being no longer required by General Tucker, they were recalled next morning. In the course of the same day (March 30th) the brigades returned to their former bivouacs: the 1st to Wessel's Farm, four miles and a half west of Bloemfontein; the 3rd to Rustfontein, two miles and a half north of the town, and the 12th Lancers and Davidson's horse-artillery to Bloemspruit, three miles east of it. General French himself was back at Headquarters the same forenoon.

The next day was the inauspicious 31st of March. The sound of guns was reported in the morning by the outposts at Bloemspruit and Bosmanskop as coming

from the direction of the waterworks. The meaning could not be doubted; General Broadwood was in difficulties and must have support. General French was summoned, and at once instructed to proceed with every available man, and with all possible speed, towards Waterval Drift, north-west of the waterworks, to render assistance. No time was lost. At half-past ten the 1st and 3rd brigades, the 12th Lancers, and Davidson's horse-artillery, hardly more than returned from Karree, received orders to concentrate and assemble at Bosmanskop without the least delay. An hour later the need for this urgency was proved by the arrival of an officer from General Broadwood appealing for reinforcements.

General French and his Staff left Bloemfontein soon after noon and by two were within hail of Springfields. He ascertained there two facts which determined his immediate movements. One was that support could avail Broadwood no further, as he had already extricated his force and was halted near Bosmanskop, the other that the Boers were reported to be massing six miles south of Bosmanskop and to be moving west. He kept Porter's brigade and the 12th Lancers behind at Springfields, and sent on Gordon's to Bosmanskop to establish communication with Colvile, who had left Bloemfontein with the 9th division that morning and was moving on Waterval Drift. Porter, starting from five miles on the other side of Bloemfontein, arrived at a later hour and was at once required to send out patrols south and south-east before nightfall, who reported the country clear in that direction. Gordon bivouacked at Bosmanskop, Porter's brigade and the 12th Lancers at Springfields, where they were joined before midnight by Broadwood's depleted column. The combined

brigades, excluding Alderson's mounted infantry that required refitting at Bloemfontein, were to march at six the next morning to join Colvile's division at Waterval Drift.

The incessant strain on the cavalry was naturally beginning to tell, and General French's command was daily becoming attenuated in numbers and in vigour. On March 31st the total available strength of the division was no more than 830 men and horses, the Inniskillings being only able to turn out five officers and four men in place of 133. The state of the horses is shown by the fact that 481 mounts of the 3rd brigade, and 305 of the 1st brigade had to be left in camp, while each battery was able to horse four guns only. This severe diminution was the inevitable result of the stress and hardship to which men and animals had been incessantly exposed. In bitter cold and pouring rains they had endured long marches, had waged frequent engagements, with scanty intervals of rest and without either tents or other shelter, and during the trying weeks after February 11th were devoid of even a sufficiency of sustaining forage.

Still the demands upon their vigilance and energies were not to be relaxed. On the morrow of the reverse at Sannah's Post (April 1st) the enemy were reported to be gathering in numbers between Brandfort and the waterworks, along the line of the Modder River from Karree south-eastwards. The cavalry were required to clear the district, to patrol continuously, and to watch any Boer movements. Early in the morning of that day Gordon sent patrols north to reconnoitre towards Krantzkraal, and Porter seven miles to the south-east. At six the rest, that is the main portion of Gordon's, Broadwood's, and Porter's brigades moved out in the direction of Waterval Drift; when about four

miles north of Bosmanskop Porter was ordered to proceed with half his brigade and four guns south-east towards the waterworks, and clear up the situation in that direction. He took with him the Scots Greys (86 sabres of all ranks), and left the Carabiniers to follow General French's main advance north-east to Waterval Drift, which was reached at eleven and a junction with Colvile's division effected.

It was evidently understood that the cavalry should relieve the infantry at Waterval, and that before dark Colvile should occupy the waterworks, which, since the disaster at Sannah's Post, had fallen into the hands of the enemy. General Colvile, having at once addressed himself to his task, found that the waterworks were still held by the Boers, and expecting to be in touch with them in two hours' time, believed that his operations would be facilitated if the cavalry would demonstrate on his left. The cavalry with one battery of horse-artillery straightway crossed the river at Waterval Drift and were wending their way up stream, when they found that Colvile's division, instead of heading onwards were in course of retiring, and that consequently Porter's brigade with only 86 men and four guns was left unsupported close to the waterworks to confront the enemy. General French thereupon countermanded the operations, and instructed Porter to bombard until dark, both to hold his ground and to protect the wounded of Broadwood's brigade on their way to Bosmanskop and Waterval.

Meanwhile Colvile, believing the situation at the waterworks and his own position to be unsafe, the waterworks and the river-bed being lightly held, and the enemy, 1200 strong, in occupation of the hills to the east beyond the river, while the balance

of the Boer forces was threatening his flanks, resolved to retire on Bosmanskop. It is difficult to understand his action, as the cavalry, on the left flank of the infantry, were not threatened by any hostile movement in that direction. Having still two hours of daylight, General French decided on further action, and endeavoured to get into communication with General Knox; but the effort was fruitless for Knox was not to be found before darkness closed in. He came up later to bivouac two miles north of the drift, when he was ordered to advance and hold the bridge spanning the river at Krantzkraal. To rest his tired horses General French felt it incumbent to pass the night at the drift, and accordingly pitched his own quarters on the north bank, while his guns and most of his cavalry were bivouacked on the south side of the river.

Late in the evening Porter returned to the Waterval bivouac on the instructions he had received. Proceeding in the morning by the north bank of the Koornspruit, at ten he had occupied the ridge at Klipkraal farm, overlooking the scene of the Sannah's Post disaster. He placed the guns and his little force on either side of them to face the waterworks, and sent forward Major Hamley's squadron (dwindled to 15 men) to reconnoitre the intervening ground to the banks of the Modder River. They had actually got up to the drift by the waterworks, when they were driven in by a heavy fire from the far side of the river. The Boers, apparently in considerable strength, attempted to press forward and follow them up, but our vigorous shell fire effectually stopped them. Closer in at the tin houses Broadwood's wounded, to the number of 89, had found shelter, all of whom the

Boers considered prisoners of war. Porter prepared to get them away to our lines, heliographed to Bloemfontein for ambulances, and reported the situation to General French. Back from Waterval came the information that Colvile with the 9th division was moving by the nearer bank of the Modder to the waterworks, and that their arrival would enable Porter to retire immediately to Waterval Drift. At half-past four the division arrived at Klipkraal; Porter explained the situation and Colvile at once retired on Bosmanskop, leaving Porter to cover his retirement and extricate the wounded at Sannah's Post.

Seeing the infantry retiring the Boers disclosed themselves in large numbers along the Modder banks, and boldly ventured out from the waterworks to attempt to cross over to the tin hospital, once more driving in Hamley's squadron; but a vigorous bombardment from our guns checked and drove them back into the river-bed. Those among the wounded who were able to walk took the opportunity to come away, and got severely shelled on the route by the enemy's guns. The ambulances left behind by Colvile now came up, and by six o'clock all the wounded had been removed across the Koornspruit, and were sent on from there to Bosmanskop. Leaving Scobell behind with 30 men to observe the enemy's movements overnight, Porter went on to join General French. It was pitch dark, and the road lay across dongas and bad drifts: a gun and several carts were overturned; but Waterval was at last reached in safety.

The following day found Colvile's division and Martyr's mounted infantry at Bosmanskop, the cavalry

being on the line of the river with their left extending three miles north to Wittington Noord, and their right to Klipkraal west of the waterworks. The situation at and around the latter place became clearer in the course of the day. They were not actually occupied by the Boers, but were commanded by a strong position held by the enemy two miles further east and five miles distant from Waterval Drift, who also held another hill in the same neighbourhood. General French was of opinion that the Krantzkraal-Bosmanskop line should be maintained by an infantry brigade posted at each of those places, that the mounted infantry should hold Waterval Drift, and that communications should be kept up with Tucker's division at Karree; but these positions were considered too outlying, and he was accordingly directed to concentrate his troops at Springfield. Colvile's division had already moved there, and Knox's brigade with the cavalry was withdrawn to join them.

General French and his Staff returned to Bloemfontein to supervise the remounts and the refitting of the dilapidated cavalry. It had been arranged that they were to move northwards beyond Brandfort on April 7th, but General French urged that such a movement would be impolitic in the condition of his troops. Not only were remounts badly needed, but the horses, from which so much hard work had already been exacted, needed some longer respite before they would be fit for any further exertion. On his representations it was arranged to allow them a fortnight's rest, unless a change of circumstances should render their active employment indispensable. The interval was devoted to inspecting daily arrivals of remounts and the fittest of the surviving horses, examining the

gun-teams and educing order out of the disarray inevitably caused by the hurried and tangled movements of the preceding days. The mounted forces were augmented during this lull by the arrival of the 8th and 14th Hussars and 7th Dragoon Guards, forming the 4th brigade under General Dickson, while two squadrons of the Inniskilling Dragoons, which had been left at Rensburg, joined Porter's brigade, and Gordon's was also strengthened by the addition of the 17th Lancers, with P. and Q. batteries of horse-artillery, while some mounted infantry were also brought into the force.

After a fortnight profitably employed in this manner the cavalry and mounted infantry were again ordered out on April 21st, this time to co-operate in the situation which had been created by the recoil of the Republican forces into the south and south-eastern parts of the Orange Free State.

Wepener, or rather Dalgety's forces at Jammersberg Drift, was being besieged, and General Rundle, with one of the relieving columns, was in striking distance of the strong Boer screen covering Dewetsdorp and barring the way to Wepener. The opposition in front of him seemed to be impeding his progress, and General French was sent to his assistance with orders to force the evacuation of Dewetsdorp and to join Rundle in the relief of the besieged garrison.[1]

On Sunday, April 22nd, the force began its advance, the first objective being the Leeuwkop hills,

[1] The force placed under his command was constituted as follows :
R. and J. Batteries Royal Horse-Artillery.
3rd Cavalry Brigade (1,350 strong) under General Gordon.
4th Cavalry Brigade (1,400 strong) under General Dickson.
Colonel Alderson's Mounted Infantry.
11th Division under General Pole-Carew : the Guard's Brigade, and the 18th (General Stevenson's) Brigade of Welsh, Warwicks, Essex, and Yorkshires.

18 miles south-west of Bloemfontein then held in possession by the enemy.

The Guards' Brigade, under General Pole-Carew, to whom the day's operations had been entrusted, moved out from Ferreira siding. General Stevenson's brigade started early from Springfield for Rietfontein, in the neighbourhood of which the concentration of the division, before the attack, was to take place. The cavalry, leaving Springfield, swung out in a circling move, keeping to the left of Stevenson's brigade, which was in the centre, the Guards with the mounted infantry on his right. Dickson's brigade was the first to come in touch with the enemy's right flank, and was met by a heavy shell fire at a place called Donkerspruit losing two men killed and four wounded. In accordance with orders Stevenson's brigade advanced to the attack of the hills in front, expecting assistance from the Guards on the right; but for some unexplained reason the latter were delayed, and, already too far advanced to retire, Stevenson decided to push home the attack unaided. The Boers held the walled farmlands of a homestead below the hills and the heights above them. A heavy shell, pom-pom, and rifle fire was poured on our advancing men, but undaunted the Welsh, Warwicks, and Essex assailed the position ahead and with great gallantry drove the enemy before them. The honours of the day unquestionably rested with Stevenson and his brigade.

At daybreak of the 23rd General French had concentrated the whole force to the west of Welgevonden and the order for the general advance on Dewetsdorp was given. The 3rd cavalry brigade and the mounted infantry reconnoitred and occupied Leeuwkop Mountain, and some small parties of Boers seen on the hills

to the south-west were driven off. Moving south-east, the 11th division and Alderson's mounted infantry halted and bivouacked at Erste Geluk farm, 28 miles south-east of Bloemfontein and about 24 miles west of Dewetsdorp.

Orders issued for the next day's march (the 24th) explained the general intention to reach the Modder River with the cavalry on the following evening at a point north of Dewetsdorp and with the remainder of the force in close touch. Before the evening of the 23rd had passed, Sir Leslie Rundle was four miles west of Dewetsdorp, which was covered by the enemy strongly entrenched in a line stretching south and south-west for a distance of five or six miles.

The march south-east along the main road towards Dewetsdorp was resumed at six next morning, when the cavalry moved off, followed later by the 11th division, with Alderson's mounted infantry acting as rear-guard. The enemy being discovered in force by the pass west of Vlakfontein, the advanced guard was increased to three squadrons, with orders to hold the Boer front, which extended from the kopjes on the north down to the road. The rest of the division swung half-right to the south and the cavalry hastened forward to occupy the crested mass of Roodekop Hill, running north to south from below the road and overlooking the plain to the east. The Boers, like ourselves, coveted the commanding northern shoulder of the range, and scoured on ahead to win it; but before they could arrive we had gained a footing on the ridge, reversed the whole advantage of the position, and spared ourselves a hazardous attack. The Boers, however, were loth to admit themselves baffled. Creeping up along the spine of the ridge, they directed a heavy fire on our men, and

succeeded for a time in disputing the ground on the dominating headland. Eventually they were forced to recognise their inability to maintain themselves against our concentrated action, and gradually gave ground, retiring north-east towards Thabanchu, with a few of our squadrons following in pursuit across the plain. About 1,500 Boers, under the command of Lemmer, had evidently resolved upon securing Roodekop as a protection to their right flank covering Dewetsdorp; and their design had been effectually frustrated.

The enemy's position at Dewetsdorp, according to Sir Leslie Rundle, had remained as on the previous evening. General French therefore decided to work round the enemy on Rundle's front, and by going south across the Modder attempt to turn their flank. The Boer front, covering Dewetsdorp on the west, extended from Nieuwjaarsfontein on the right to Bultfontein on the left; Rundle's headquarters were at Constantia further to the west. General French feared that the enemy would slip away during the night; but he went on with his plans on the chance of their staying. He ordered the cavalry to march at one for the Modder, to essay a passage before nightfall by Lagaging farm adjacent to the Thabanchu road and project their left flank southwards, intending that Rundle's mounted force should co-operate and endeavour to join with them by moving south of Dewetsdorp across the Modder and on northwards. In this way Rundle was to bar the west, south, and south-west exits from the Boer position, and at the same time Pole-Carew was to occupy the hill on the east of Damfontein nearest to Rietfontein. If the enemy should stand before his advance, his duty would be to aim at shutting them in on the north, crossing the river to

the support of the cavalry. If, however, the Boers, becoming restive, should turn in retreat, Rundle's function would be to draw in after them, while Pole-Carew would leave Damfontein and join the cavalry at the river.

Early in the afternoon, when all the orders had been issued, the march towards the Modder was resumed. The 11th division arrived at Damfontein in due course, and at once went into bivouac for the night. The cavalry had to contend with obstinate opposition, and were obliged to halt short of the river at Grootfontein, a strong mountainous position commanding the pass into the Modder valley. It was already evening, with the advanced squadrons not more than forty minutes' ride from Modder Drift, but still firing volleys in the shadowy dusk against the Boer position on Vaalbank. After long hours wholly spent in heavy work and constant fighting, the cavalry had made good headway, though their progress had not been sufficient to entirely block the enemy's line of retreat to Thabanchu. The casualties for the day were confined to the cavalry, which had lost one officer and seven men killed, and 30 officers and 23 men wounded. Of the horses 90 were disabled or had died from exhaustion.

The General's apprehension that the enemy might elude him by prematurely dropping out of their positions was confirmed early in the afternoon by the sight of a body of about 900 Boers retreating northwards. It can hardly have surprised him, therefore, to hear in the evening that they were falling away altogether from the neighbourhood of Dewetsdorp. The Boers were not to be caught just then, and bitter indeed was the chagrin of the cavalry to find their hopes and exertions discomfited after all that they had hazarded and accomplished. In

their impetuosity they had flung themselves forward into a position which the surrounding heights made dangerously insecure, but they were heedless of risk in their anxiety for success. The wariness of their enemy had cheated them of the prize, but the labours of the day had by no means proved futile; they had at least succeeded in turning the formidable Dewetsdorp position. If all that was attempted had not been attained, a substantial advantage had been reaped, and immediate steps were to be taken to follow it up.

At five in the morning of the following day, April 25th, the entire cavalry division was standing to arms, and General Dickson's patrols were reconnoitring the situation. Heading for the Modder River, 200 Boers on the west bank were seen to cross the river and ride away towards Rietpoort on the east. At half-past nine the cavalry passed the Modder River without opposition, and information was conveyed to Pole-Carew that the ridge west of the Modder for four miles north and south of the road to Thabanchu was free of the enemy, and that he should follow the cavalry. Heliographic communication having been established with General Chermside, the enemy was found to have also evacuated the positions in front of him, which were now in his possession. But for small parties of sniping Boers nothing of the enemy could be seen.

The Boer convoy must have gained a good start as no trace of its passing through the poort was visible; and indeed later information showed that the enemy had moved their wagons as early as the evening of Sunday the 20th, taking them by way of Daggafontein and Naauwpoort to Patchoa.

General Rundle's front having thus been cleared and the enemy dispersed, General French had success-

fully carried out the first half of his orders, and his thoughts were now directed towards the relief of the Wepener garrison. No news of the fate of Wepener had reached the cavalry since leaving Bloemfontein on the 22nd, and this uncertainty was a powerful incentive for General French to push ahead with increased vigour to the rescue of Dalgety and his hard-pressed men. After making arrangements for holding the drift east of Vaalbank, and for a thorough reconnaissance of Rietpoort on the right of the drift, he turned the cavalry south. By noon French was three miles north-east of Dewetsdorp, and shortly after he and General Rundle had met. Here it was arranged that Brabazon with his yeomanry and four companies of mounted infantry, 1,100 in all, then in sight three miles east of Dewetsdorp, should without fail advance on Wepener, supported by Gordon and his two regiments. Pole-Carew, out on the ridges of the Thabanchu road, immediately west of the Modder River, received orders to remain in his positions till Wepener was relieved.

Prisoners and natives were even now, after their fashion of anticipating events, declaring that the relief had already been effected. General French, only half believing the news, reached Dewetsdorp at two in the afternoon, feeling certain that some definite information would reach him there. At midnight he received the gratifying news that the Boers, having failed in a supreme effort to enforce Dalgety's surrender, had raised the siege at daybreak on April 25th, and evacuating their positions north of Wepener had retired towards Ladybrand. There can be but little doubt that the turning movement of the cavalry, which caused the screen of defence at Dewetsdorp to collapse, as well as the arrival of General Brabant

before Wepener from the south, had contributed materially to the happy attainment of this result.

The position of the cavalry on the Thabanchu road made it likely that the enemy, avoiding that way, would strike in the direction of Ladybrand. General French hoped to follow them there, but later orders hurried him away on the evening of April 25th to Thabanchu in support of Ian Hamilton's insufficient working-strength between that place and Sannah's Post. Pole-Carew's division and Rundle's were to follow closely behind; Brabazon was to remain with Chermside left in command at Dewetsdorp, and Gordon was instructed to join the 4th and the remainder of the 3rd brigade on the Thabanchu road.

Early in the morning of April 26th the cavalry began their 36 miles' journey to Thabanchu. They met their supply-column on the left side of the river, recrossed by the drift, and advanced north through the Rietpoort Pass. The 11th division marched eastwards, and soon after Rundle's division left their camping-ground three miles east of Dewetsdorp. At about ten Pole-Carew, receiving orders to return to Bloemfontein, detached himself from the general advance. At half-past five the cavalry reached Kopjes Kraal, some eight or nine miles south of Thabanchu, and four miles in their rear bivouacked the 8th division. Not a Boer had been seen all day; natives, the only newsbringers, declared that the enemy had gone north-east to Thaba Patchoa Heights on the Leeuw road.

Reconnoitring squadrons were sent out early next morning. One of these had orders to drive the enemy from the neighbourhood of Thabanchu, detaching a troop to explore north-east along the road towards Andriesfontein; the other was directed north-west to

open communications with General Ian Hamilton, who was expected on the road leading to Thabanchu. The rest of the cavalry and the infantry marched at an hour later, and soon afterwards General French arrived at Khabanyana River. Ascertaining there that Ian Hamilton had reached Thabanchu and was in no immediate need of assistance, he ordered the cavalry to halt and graze. Rundle's division subsequently came up, and was directed to go on to Thabanchu, whither General French himself proceeded, and met Ian Hamilton at ten on the following morning.

General Hamilton had left Bloemfontein with 2,000 men on April 22nd, preliminary to his flank march north, and on the succeeding day had retaken the waterworks. Pushing eastward, and reinforced by General Smith-Dorrien's brigade, on the 25th he was informed of the enemy's retreat, and obtained leave to continue his advance by the road connecting Sannah's Post with Thabanchu. At the Israel Poort pass he had a successful encounter with a Boer force, and he had completed his journey to Thabanchu by the evening of the 26th.

When General French joined him there, the Thabanchu Mountain overlooking the village, and the exit of the pass leading across it towards Ladybrand, were in the hands of the enemy. After they had conferred, it was decided to gain possession of these positions.

Dickson, with his brigade and guns, received instructions to proceed with the cavalry division south-east towards Alexandria, and threaten the enemy's flank and rear on the south: Ian Hamilton, with his mounted infantry and a battery of artillery, would engage the enemy's right flank on the north; and Smith-Dorrien was to move east against the enemy's front. At five

in the evening the infantry were advancing up the first terrace of Schuinskop and the mounted infantry were scaling the crest, while Hamilton's guns attacked the hills to the east connecting with Eden Height, when the fire of two guns was drawn from a hill north-east.

The result of the combined action was to evict the enemy from Thabanchu Mountain and his adjoining positions, leaving him in possession only of the heavily buttressed back-portion known as Eden. Two companies of infantry were sent to occupy the top of Thabanchu, and were relieved later by some companies of Rundle's division, march-wearied troops that had not reached the village till four o'clock.

The cavalry division retired to Kabanyana River for the night, and the mounted infantry held the hills north-west of Schuinshoek. That same evening General French planned for next day a combined movement of his mounted forces round both the enemy's flanks, to dislodge them from the positions they still held, and to shoulder them entirely off the heights and the edges of the cliffs.

Eden formed the Boer centre; his right was on the hills west of Egypte, and his left on the eminences commanding the pass leading towards Ladybrand. In accordance with the instructions issued over-night, Gordon's brigade marched eastwards, at half-past five in the morning, upon the enemy's left rear, towards Alexandria from the south; Dickson's brigade left the river, passed at a sharp pace through Thabanchu, moved north-east on Schuinskop, and still forward to Morolo in the direction of Brandsdrift. The intention was that these two forces should join hands and cut off the Boer retreat. Smith-Dorrien's brigade, after strengthening Dickson from Schuinskop, followed on south-eastwards and seized some kopjes

near Walhoek. The mounted infantry, some 1,200 strong, under Ridley, deployed on the outer circle of infantry, pushing out sections eastwards to support the cavalry. Rundle's division held the top of Thabanchu Mountain and the inlying positions commanding the village. Dickson's brigade was intermittently making good headway, and at last so troubled the Boer rear from a point they reached about noon, that large bodies abruptly forsook the concealment of their strongholds and fell swiftly away north-east. Their numbers were estimated at 4,000, and full another 2,000 must have remained hanging about the hills holding on to their defences.

Dickson still bore onwards, till a severe fire, covering the retiring Boers from the north, made him concentrate to return their withering volleys. Reinforcements for the enemy now came pouring in from Winburg, till, seeing his left flank in danger and the day wearing late, Dickson desisted from further action and ordered a retirement of his force on Schuinshoek.

Determined resistance was encountered by Gordon's brigade, which had thrown itself forward to beyond Springhaan Nek. They worked with a will, but no effort to oust or circumvent the enemy could avail to force a passage through to Dickson at Alexandria.

At nightfall the troops were placed thus: Ian Hamilton's division retired before dark, bivouacked on the hills four miles north of the village, with detachments of cavalry on their flanks. Rundle's division, in regained security, occupied Thabanchu Mountain on the right, his centre resting on hills one mile east of Thabanchu village, his left to the north; Gordon's brigade retired from their advanced ground before nightfall, and, after securing Springhaan Nek against any assault, encamped in the neighbourhood. Dick-

son's brigade stationed themselves north-east near Egypte. Israel's Poort was held by some mounted infantry.

The losses for the day were one officer killed and nine wounded in the 3rd brigade, two wounded in the 4th, one man killed and 26 wounded.

Early the next morning, being Sunday, April 29th, Dickson's brigade withdrew to the vicinity of Thabanchu and bivouacked close to Fountain Nek, at a spruit three miles north-east of the village, while Gordon's rested on the Khabanyana River. A little ater Rundle pushed his right along the ridge eastwards from Thabanchu Mountain, but finding the Boers still in position of a commanding boulder-strewn ridge, known as Stonehenge, he did not insist on an assault.

The retirement of the cavalry was the signal for the enemy to close against our flanks. Gordon at Khabanyana River was heavily engaged, and becoming hard pressed, one battalion of Suffolks, one company of mounted infantry, and one battery started at noon to his support, followed by Dickson with his brigade along the Dewetsdorp road. From dawn till nightfall the two brigades and the infantry were subjected to hard and incessant fighting.

When the weary day had ended, the overwrought men and horses settled into bivouac two miles west of the town, by a stream rising on the Poort.

The presence of the Boers near the Dewetsdorp road, who were engaging Gordon, gave concern to Rundle regarding the fate of a convoy on the road from Dewetsdorp, and he urged Brabazon, who was to leave Dewetsdorp at ten with the yeomanry for Thabanchu, to hasten on to its care. General French also at once ordered a detachment of all arms to its assistance from Thabanchu.

Towards evening the convoy was reported to be halting 12 miles south of Thabanchu; and at midnight two battalions of infantry of the 8th division, one squadron of the 16th Lancers, and one battery of field-artillery, went out to bring it in; and these were, at Rundle's request, followed by three more squadrons early next morning. The welcome news came in at ten o'clock that the convoy was safe, the Boers having only captured some oxen, that Brabazon had also joined, had reported the Boers retiring from the Dewetsdorp road, and expected to arrive at Thabanchu in the afternoon. General French directed that 400 yeomen, on reaching Khabayana River, should remain there to hold the pass on the Thabanchu-Dewetsdorp road; and that the remaining two battalions, the 7th, under Colonel Helgar and the 4th under Colonel Blair, should come on to Thabanchu.

To recover the horses, after the seven days of incessant work, before the advance north, General French suggested that the two brigades should at once retire to Bloemfontein, and Ian Hamilton remain in temporary support of Rundle till Brabant's arrival. But the main advance had already begun, and Ian Hamilton was to move with it. French remained at Thabanchu, while Hamilton left at six on the morning of Monday, April 30th, for Houtnek, with his mounted infantry, Smith-Dorrien's brigade of Shropshires, Gordons, and Cornwalls, and his artillery; two squadrons from the 3rd brigade, and four guns going out at the same hour to assist with a demonstration on his right flank towards Schuinshoek.

From their diminished activity on his front along the Dewetsdorp road, French judged that the Boers were withdrawing from Thabanchu. He was right;

about 5,000 strong, under Botha, they had massed in force across the pass at Houtnek, offering strong opposition to Ian Hamilton's small and gallant force, still separated by some six miles from Bruce Hamilton's infantry and Broadwood's cavalry brigades which were on the way to join him.

Ian Hamilton determined to secure Thaba, a bold mountain pile which was the key to the position commanding Houtnek Pass on the left. With the object of turning the Boers' right at this point, Kitchener's Horse and part of Smith-Dorrien's brigade attempted to gain a footing on the mountain, while the remainder of the force held the enemy's front, extending along the level ridge at Houtnek. The Boers in superior strength retained their hold on the broad summit of Thaba, and poured a scathing Mauser and gun fire into Hamilton's little force. Too weak to roll the enemy away, he clung all day closely to the positions he had won, and holding on to them through the night, sent word to French of his difficulty, asking for immediate reinforcements by daylight. French at once issued orders for three of the fittest squadrons of the 3rd and 4th brigades respectively to concentrate at seven o'clock on the morning of May 1st at Bultfontein four miles north of Thabanchu, and two battalions of Rundle's infantry with a battery of field-artillery to march in the same direction a little earlier. Dickson was to push forward all the available men of his brigade with his battery of horse-artillery and two pom-poms to be at Hamilton's disposal, while two squadrons and two guns under Little were to threaten the south-west of Thaba Mountain.

French himself rode out to a position three miles south of Ian Hamilton, with the infantry reinforcements he had despatched covering his right rear.

At half-past ten the enemy was still inactive, and Hamilton's dispositions were beginning to develope.

The cavalry and mounted infantry were working round Thaba Mountain, and when sufficiently advanced Smith-Dorrien's brigade, in process of establishment on the plateau of the mountain, was to make the final assault. Shortly after noon Thaba was in our hands, except for the shoulder, commanding the road leading over the pass to Jacobsrust, which Ian Hamilton had decided to seize instead of the actual Houtnek Pass.

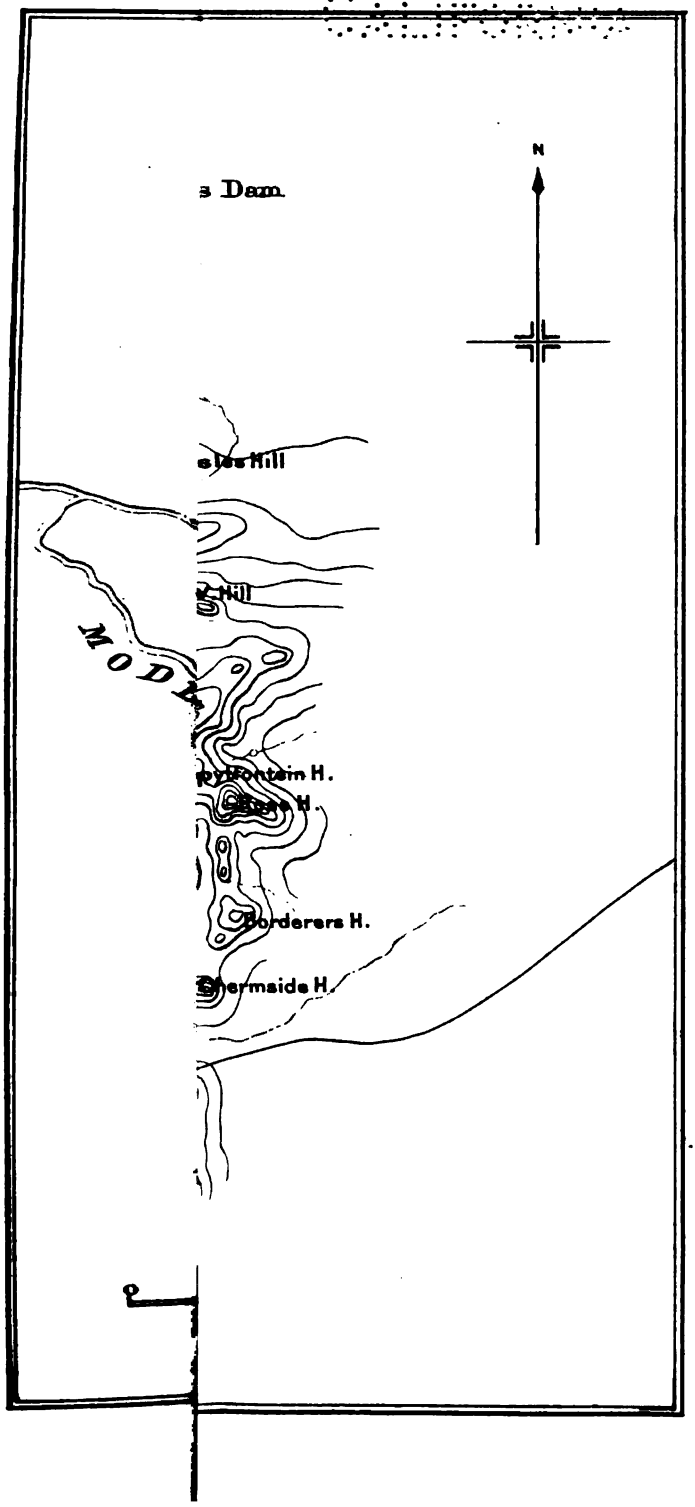
Five miles west of Houtnek the cavalry were now making their presence felt in the Boers' rear, while Smith-Dorrien watched from a commanding position for the right moment. Small parties of Boers began to fall away, and the signal for attack was given. The Gordons, Colonel MacBean leading, rushed forward and, supported by the Shropshires, threw themselves against the shoulder, which they gallantly carried in full sight of the troops. Driven from their fortress-like position the Boers were all now dispersing in full flight, and the capture of Houtnek by the Shropshires gave Ian Hamilton complete command of the pass. On the next day he was able to join the force awaiting him at Jacobsrust and with it to advance on Winburg.

The passage opened northwards and their share in the task done, the reinforcements sent by French returned to their old quarters, and by the morning of Wednesday, May 2nd, were back again with their own brigades.

This was the first pause after ten days of continuous hard work, which wrought sad havoc. The strain showed among the horses of the two brigades. Out of 950 horses of the 3rd brigade 250, and out of 950 of the 4th brigade more than that number were declared unfit. The situation round Thabanchu had

settled down; not a Boer was to be seen on the Dewetsdorp road, nor could the returning troops from Houtnek espy any, though detached parties still hung about the mountains south of Eden with a few small quick-firers, and their laager was still located eastward near Alexandria. In the circumstances, and Brabant having now arrived at Thabanchu, French decided to withdraw his cavalry on Bloemfontein, and at day-break on May 3rd they began their march.

1900.



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1. CAVALRY ON THE MARCH.

. THE KOORNSPRUIT AT SANNAH'S POST.

3. THE FARMHOUSE ON THE NEAR SIDE OF THE KOORNSPRUIT.

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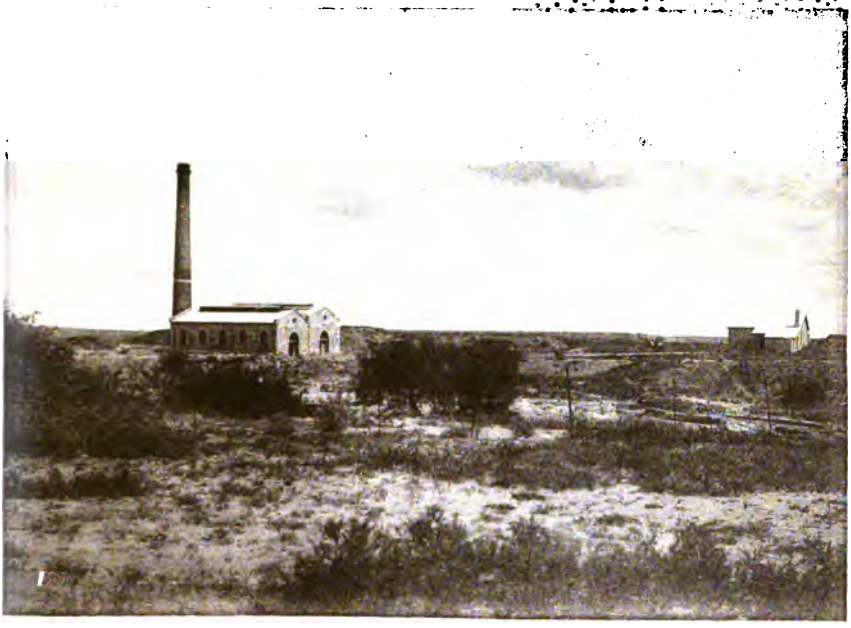
GENERAL FRENCH'S MARCH EAST OF BLOEMFONTEIN TO THABANCHU.



1. THE WATERWORKS (SANNAH'S POST) AT THE MODDER RIVER.

2. GENERAL BROADWOOD CROSSING THE MODDER RIVER AT THE WATERWORKS, SANNAH'S POST.

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PANORAMA OF THABANCHU.

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CHAPTER VIII

FROM BLOEMFONTEIN TO KROONSTAD.

THE Boers had been full of aggression and activity throughout the south-eastern Free State, and in every operation directed against them the cavalry had taken a leading part. Their share in the work was large and creditable, in spite of enfeebled horses, reduced squadrons, and all the other disadvantages that arise from want of rest and refitting. Always on the move, they patrolled, kept in touch with the enemy and his movements, assisted in important actions, fought him and turned his positions, and helped to sweep the country clear from the south to Thabanchu and beyond. The Boers were scattered after the engagement of Thabanchu and Houtnek, and were in retreat north-east. Thabanchu appeared safe; Rundle and his division were there, and Brabant hourly expected. General French's share was completed, and he must turn his forces north, for it was May 3rd, and Lord Roberts's advance was already in progress. It was essential, however, first to re-equip his forces at the base; but even as they turned towards Bloemfontein, they were summoned to take part in the advance north, and forced to direct all their energies to catching up the main column already far ahead near the Vet River. On May 7th French came up with Lord Roberts's main

column at Smaldeel, and pioneering the way north, by clever turning movements compelled the enemy to evacuate his strong position at Kroonstad, and, receiving the keys, entered the town. Falling in again with the general advance a week later, French was striking vigorously ahead to gain a crossing over the Vaal before the retreating Boers could gather in force to oppose him. On May 24th, two days in advance of the whole army, ahead of the commandos of Grobelaar and Lemmer who were racing him for the Klipriversberg position, and to the surprise even of the Commander-in-Chief, French led the cavalry across the Vaal into the country of the agressor, and was the first to plant the flag by the gates of the city of the Golden Rand. The advance on Johannesberg affords a striking proof of the usefulness of the cavalry in the course of the campaign, and more than sword or lance was the moral influence of their presence.

Since Sunday, May 6th, Smaldeel had been made the temporary headquarters of Lord Roberts and his Staff. The various units making up the army of advance to Pretoria had come into line by the 8th; each command was ready to carry out its part, and Lord Roberts's general plan of operations was prepared and complete for fulfilment. The immediate objective was Kroonstad, after Bloemfontein the most important town of the Orange Free State; formerly the capital, it was now again the seat of the Free State Government. Between Smaldeel and Kroonstad, a distance of about 55 miles up the railway, a large Boer force, consisting of Transvaal and Orange Free State burghers, estimated at over 5,000 strong, under the command of Louis Botha, was known to be massed. The river crossings, those of the Zand River and Rietspruit especially, presented favourable features for

a strong defence, and the Boschrand, a chain of high and wooded ridges a few miles south of Kroonstad, was a formidable natural barrier, which had been further strengthened by very considerable outworks and entrenchments.

Against a resolute defensive force a frontal advance would be long and wearisome, and above all costly. Again, the experience of Poplar Grove, Abraham's Kraal, and Dewetsdorp, went to show that very strong positions were abandoned by the Boers at the first signs of danger threatening their flanks or lines of retirement, and that by clever rear and flank guard tactics they had always been able to make good their retreat. Obviously the scheme promising greatest success was that which contrived to draw the enemy to stand, or hold him in front, until a very wide circling movement, developing unperceived, could surround him and force him in to surrender, or, in less fortunate circumstances, inflict heavy loss on him in his retirement.

This was the plan that must have recommended itself to General French; but Lord Roberts, apparently wishing to avoid delay, and fearing an entanglement of the troops engaged in such a manœuvre, decided on a middle course. Bent on a march through to Pretoria, he was satisfied that the enemy should be turned out of their positions with as little loss of time and men as possible, and he directed the main column of the army (consisting of the 11th and 7th divisions, with some mounted corps of infantry, divisional cavalry, field and heavy artillery) to continue their advance along the line of the railway. General Ian Hamilton with his force, composed of Smith-Dorrien's brigade, Ridley's mounted infantry, and Broadwood's cavalry, then near the village of

Winburg, was to operate on the east or right flank, converging all the time on Kroonstad by way of Ventersburg, nearly due north. The operations on the left flank, with which this narrative is mainly concerned, were entrusted to the 1st and 4th cavalry brigades, numbering about 2,000 men and 12 horse-artillery guns, together with Hutton's mounted force numbering 2,250 men and six horse-artillery guns, the whole to be under the command of General French. Their instructions were to keep well to the west of the main column, and to turn all the Boer positions one after another, right up to, and including Kroonstad itself.

This strategical disposition of the army meant a repetition of the Poplar Grove tactics on a somewhat larger scale, and was likely to effect very similar results.

On May 9th Porter's brigade marched out of camp from Smaldeel, shaping their course towards Du Preez Laager Drift, a crossing over the Zand River about twelve miles west of Virginia siding, thought to be well clear of the enemy's right flank. Carts containing two days' forage and rations accompanied it, besides a number of led horses, to be used as pack-horses, should the carts not be able to keep pace with the advance. Two officers' patrols, having reported the Du Preez and De Klerck's Drifts clear, a squadron of Scots Greys under Scobell was sent forward and seized Du Preez Laager Drift at half-past two in the afternoon.

In the meantime Hutton's mounted force was under way from Welgelegen siding to join the cavalry. In the evening Lord Kitchener, who had ridden over with Hutton from Welgelegen, met General French on the Zand River as his division

was crossing, and gave Lord Roberts's orders to the effect, that the cavalry and mounted infantry, avoiding serious engagements, were to converge on Ventersburg road station, the point for which the centre column was making. The plan was hardly one to appeal to a cavalry leader, as it practically meant tying down 5,000 mounted men to a slow infantry advance, with little chance of inflicting much loss on the enemy. A move further west, culminating in a circling movement completely round Kroonstad, cutting the Boer line of retreat and the railway to the north, or, failing this, a compromise between the two, would have seemed more useful and better adapted to the nature of the force. What the Boer tactics would be it was not difficult for General French to foretell, and the sequel proved him correct.

On the evening of May 9th the relative positions of the army of advance, spread out in semicircular form near the Zand River, was as follows:

General French, with the 1st cavalry brigade and Hutton's mounted infantry, was on the banks of the Zand River west of Virginia siding, with the 4th brigade a few miles south; Lord Roberts was in the centre with the 11th division, and the 7th division was at Welgelegen siding, nine miles south of Virginia siding. General Ian Hamilton was on the right and to the east of Virginia siding, one mile south of the Zand River. From their positions on the northern banks of the Zand, the Boers looked down on this menacing display, and could not fail to understand its purpose. Would they stand and face our arms, a formidable outlook of 20 miles of fronting opposition?

The authorities had intelligence of between 3,000 and 4,000 of the enemy holding a position near

Virginia siding with several guns ; but from more than one source of information General French learned that the Boers were transferring themselves, their guns, and their resistance from the banks of the Zand River to the hills south of Kroonstad.

On Thursday the 10th, at six o'clock on a bitterly cold morning, camps were struck and the cavalry advance began in compliance with Lord Roberts's orders. The cavalry led, followed by Hutton's mounted infantry acting as support-pivot and reserve of the division in case of need. The country along the line of march was long rolling downs and open veldt, with here and there the dry bed of a spruit. An occasional farm, with a dam of water for the herds, was the only sign of life and habitation.

Soon after nine the 1st brigade had reached a ridge three miles south of the Dirksberg diamond mine, Hutton following two miles in the rear, with the 4th brigade another mile behind him.

A reconnoitring party sent down towards Rietspruit siding was heavily fired on near Rietspruit. On our approach the Boers at first threw up their hands and offered to surrender, and then, it is said, picking up their rifles shot our men down as they neared the position in the hollow. The remainder of the brigade following seized a flat-topped hill nearly west of Carlspan, from which a large number of mounted Boers could be seen riding away towards Virginia siding, as if uncertain of their direction. The next moment they sighted our column, and, our object revealing itself to them, they halted and after throwing out a strong flank guard down the length of the Rietspruit valley seemingly turned back and retired towards Ventersburg road station.

General French, surveying the lie of the country from

the top of the rise, spied a well defined ridge, called Vredeverdrag, to his right front, which was evidently the key to the surrounding positions covering the enemy's right flank, and which he decided to make his next objective. He instructed Porter to take advantage of the stretch of dead ground between his own brigade and the Boers, and secure the hill. The brigade started off with an advanced guard commanded by Captain Elworthy thrown well forward. A squadron of Australian Horse was pushed ahead to seize the hill, but meeting with a flank fire from two guns and some rifles, a squadron of Inniskillings under Captain Haig, and later a squadron of Scots Greys, were sent out to his support. The three squadrons gained the hill, and were not to be shaken by the desultory fire from the flank guard of the Boers. It was soon, however, noticed that the fire was rapidly increasing in strength, not only from the right rear, but also from the front, north, and north-east. From their hiding-places in kraals and sheltering dongas the Boers began to pour a withering cross-fire into our men on the hill. The fire grew overpowering and the storming-party had no choice but to retreat from their exposed positions, the supports not being yet at hand. Retiring under cover of our guns, they fell back and the position was temporarily abandoned. Seeing our men retiring, but unable to seize the crest of the hill under the heavy bombardment of our guns, the Boers extended round its slopes and slyly creeping up under cover through the broad blades of a tall-grown mealie field, gradually pressed forward their attack. Their object was clearly to work round Porter's left flank, isolate and cut down his force. Taking in the situation, Porter dismounted two of his squadrons to engage the enemy and check

their further advance, and Hutton despatched Alderson and his corps to act in support.

The 4th brigade had come up, and with their help General French decided to turn the enemy by the west and north-west and relieve the pressure on Porter. Leaving Alderson to cover Porter's right, and instructing the latter to follow him as soon as he had extricated his brigade, General French who had already grown impatient of being kept back, himself took the 4th brigade along the Boer front under a heavy rifle fire. The enemy had remained carefully screened, but suddenly some two hundred horsemen in khaki rode out boldly into the open, wildly firing their rifles at a range of 1,200 yards. General French at once ordered the brigade to charge. In open formation several squadrons strove their hardest to close and ride them down, but the enemy with his instinct for safety did not wait for the onset; perceiving the determined movement, he turned, scattered, and fled. In vain our horses tried to gain on the light-weighted ponies of the Boers; out-paced and winded they broke down, and the enemy got away, leaving three prisoners and seven dead behind.

Leaving Hutton's mounted infantry to re-occupy Vredeverdrag Hill, and protect his right flank, General French hurried on his march to the north, edging as much eastwards as the positions of his opponents would allow, always feeling his flank for an opportunity to close in on the right and to the rear of the enemy. Still they fell back before our advance, and by four in the afternoon the cavalry were at Posen Hill, and able to discern the enemy's movements.

At this time the infantry, far away to the east, were beginning to cross the Zand River at Virginia siding, and a brisk fire of artillery at long range could be

distinctly heard. Hutton, who had reached the lower and western slopes of the Vredeverdrag Hill despatched all the troops with him towards the east to establish contact with the main army. Unfortunately Pilcher's force, which had been left to water their horses, overlooked the change of direction, and following the cavalry, left Hutton with a very slender force, as Alderson, too, had pressed on after French.

The character of the landscape was now changed. The high swinging downs, preventing heliographic communication, had flattened into a broad reach of country, scattered over with little ranges of kopjes, rocky groups, or solitary stiff-built hills. Over the grassy slopes and brown boulders by nek and kloof Boer horsemen in large parties were leisurely picking their way, evidently in full retreat on Kroonstad, and far away, about 12 miles off, a long line of wagons crawled forwards. But no opportunity could be perceived for cutting off their retreat, as the Boers, early conscious of the cavalry's intentions, had all day guarded, and even now continued to guard, their flanks strongly to prevent our breaking through.

The winter's sun was fast setting, and though the wagons had not come up, the cavalry halted to bivouac, forced to make what cheer they could before the cold frosts of a shelterless night. The day had carried with it some measure of success. Though prevented by the presence of a large and aggressive force between them and the railway from cutting a way through to Ventersburg road, they had yet by their forward movement so thrown out the calculations of the Boers that their retreat was precipitated, and the advance of our main arms to the neighbourhood of Kroonstad assured.

In the evening reports were received that the

casualties among the cavalry were more serious than had been thought, nine officers and 152 men being killed, wounded, or missing in the three brigades. The officer killed was Captain Elworthy, a capable soldier, who had commanded the advanced guard, and his lieutenants, Collis and Moncrieff, were both wounded. Captain Haig of the Inniskillings was taken prisoner, and also Lieutenant Wilkinson of the Australian Horse. Civil Surgeon Parham attached to the first brigade was also wounded. The distance covered exceeded 30 miles, and the day's losses in horses amounted to 224. It seems a matter for regret that parts of four different units, with no one in supreme command, should have been employed instead of one regiment with greater cohesion, and that the remainder of the brigade should have halted instead of pushing on to the top of the ridge, and so saved, if not those who were shot down, at least the rest from capture.

The chief fighting of the main column fell to Ian Hamilton, who on the north side of the river found himself opposed by the enemy that he had driven before him at Winburg. On his left Tucker, with the 7th division, crossed the river and dispersed the Boers and two guns from the long-backed ridge running down to it. Given the same orders as General French, Broadwood intended to curve round inwards to Ventersdorp, and had got well on his way when, owing to a misunderstanding his battery was drawn off, and expecting an emergency, he interrupted his movement and was not afterwards able to complete it.

Ian Hamilton's column bivouacked south of Ventersburg with Tucker's division close by. Three miles south of Ventersburg and 30 miles south of Kroonstad halted the main army headed by Gordon's brigade and the mounted infantry slightly beyond the

Ventersburg road. General French was well in advance at Zonderhout, 20 miles south-west of Kroonstad.

Lord Roberts saw the advantage of cutting the railway line north of Kroonstad before daylight, to prevent if possible the escape of the officials and the loss of rolling-stock, and General French was anxious that it should be done as soon as possible, though he saw no opportunity till next day. It would have been well could the project have been attempted that night, but the chances of failure made it too hazardous a risk. It was already long after dark and a variety of difficulties came under consideration. The long and rapid march from Bloemfontein, ending with the tiring day of over 30 miles, had exhausted the horses so thoroughly that even a selection from the best might prove unfit for a march of probably from 40 to 50 miles more. Scant knowledge of the country, wire fencing, dongas, and spruits, the undetermined crossing of the Vaalsch River, crowned with the obstacle of total darkness,—not enough for such a venture were the few hours remaining before dawn.

Dispositions were accordingly made for an early start next morning, Friday, May 11th.

Pilcher's corps of mounted infantry about 350, including the Queensland and New Zealand men, were to be attached for the day to the 1st and 4th brigades, all details and unfit men and horses to be sent back to Ventersburg road. Of the whole 4th brigade only 392 horses were found in marching condition, apart from 160 out on detached duties.

Before sunrise on a bitterly cold morning the cavalry and Pilcher's companies set forth in a north-westerly direction. Hutton was to advance

in support from Swaartpan north-east towards the railway at Geneva siding, and occupy a position astride the Kroonstad-Hoopstad road connecting French's wider-reaching flank movement with the main army. He was thus to divert their attention from the cavalry, and engage the enemy reported to be strongly entrenched at Boschplaats along the Boschrand.

At eleven General French left Bloemhof farm, 17 miles west-south-west of Kroonstad, and took a direction north slightly to eastward, towards Bester's Kraal on the north-western bend of the Vaalsch River.

From Palmietkuil, 14 miles due west of Kroonstad, a detachment was sent north-east to reconnoitre for a drift across the Vaalsch River, and finding Valsch-river Drift 10 miles north-west of Kroonstad fordable, they took possession of it unopposed; the 1st brigade securing the left bank while the 4th crossed to hold the right. Instead of noon, as originally intended, it was four o'clock by the time General French had established a footing on Vaalsch River. Scarcely had the leading squadrons begun to occupy the hills on the right bank commanding the drift, when they noticed about 3,000 Boers coming over from Kroonstad. Finding General French in position the majority retired, while the rest engaged our advanced troops till sunset, and with a few guns shelled the hills north of the drift.

General French at once ordered Major Hunter-Weston, with Burnham, 60 men and two officers from the 1st brigade, with light kit and 60 selected horses, to destroy the railway and telegraph at a point north of Kroonstad. Leaving at half-past four they were to get as close to the railway as possible before dark, and

soon after midnight two reports were heard, signifying that the task had succeeded. They had struck the line 18 miles off near America siding, coming in between the Boers trekking north, destroyed it at imminent risk to themselves, and by two o'clock next day were back with seven prisoners, having lost but one man wounded and one horse. Word was sent to Hutton on the Hoopstad-Kronstad road near Welgelegen to follow in support of General French's operations in the enemy's rear and hold Vaalsch River Drift.

In the morning of Saturday May 12th the 1st brigade crossed the drift over to the north bank, one squadron of the 4th going forward to reconnoitre and clear up the situation, while another moved eastwards along the high ground towards Kroonstad. The morning was cold, and a close fog concealed even the immediate foreground; but already before seven o'clock suspicious movements of the enemy discovered themselves along the roads branching off north to Kroonstad; their flank guard fell back unresisting, making it evident to our advancing squadrons that the strong and well-entrenched positions south of Kroonstad had been abandoned, and that the enemy had gone well on their way north.

General French sent Dickson's brigade on to Jordan's siding north of the town, and himself with Porter's brigade approached it from the west, occupying the ridges to the north. Coming out to meet the General the landdrost at once surrendered the town, and Kroonstad, President Steyn's latest capital, was securely in our hands. General French had not surrounded the enemy, the conditions being obviously against it; but his turning movements had greatly hastened the retreat of the commandos, and made them release their hold on their strategically

admirable positions at Boschrand, twice strong with a double range of hills, removed their resistance to our advancing infantry, and opened the way for the Commander-in-Chief and the 11th division into Kroonstad. Bivouacking 18 miles from the town on the previous night, Lord Roberts at the head of his main column entered it at noon on Saturday, May 12th, amidst the acclamations of some of the inhabitants and the sullen silence of the rest.

The English watchers in Kroonstad, looking far off towards Boschrand, strained their quivering sight harder when they became aware of a little cloud of dust on the south horizon. For many days Boer bulletins had posted up Federal successes and the check of British advances, though contrary news had also filtered through unofficially. The cloud was rolling on. President Steyn roused from his rest, for the morning had scarce begun, also came out to see. The veil of dust lifted at last to show a straggling irregular mass of men, some mounted, others leading tired horses, bearing towards Vaalsch River Drift. They were the first arrivals from Boschrand, and must have left their well-entrenched positions without firing a single shot. The President understood, and in a moment had joined his burghers, exhorting them to fall back again on Boschrand. Some impression he made, for the men wavered as if about to turn; but if they had any such intention, it gave way before the arrival of more of their comrades hurrying by in flight. Expostulation was vain, and vain too the fury of the President, his wild gesticulations and threats when he found he could not stay his burghers or in any way control them.

Powerless, on the banks of the Vaalsch River, by the stony crossing, President Steyn gathered up

his official staff. Yet a moment he lingered, hoping against hope. He looked over the piles of telegrams coming in from every side, but there was no help in any of them; he must go. Shaking hands with Louis Botha, who had to depart in charge of his commando, he wished him *Alles te beste* (God speed you), and walked off, with a hunted look on his face, alone. The heads of the newly-proclaimed capital also found themselves obliged, if they would not be left behind, to make off with the rest. Only a group of some 60 burghers stood in the market-square, listlessly watching him go, without a word of encouragement or regret. At last a few of the party detached themselves and escorted their late President to the cart in waiting for him, and without more delay he drove away alone into the darkness.

On Sunday, May 13th, the troops were allowed to rest; but on the evening of the 14th General French received orders to proceed north with his division, with the object of gaining the bridge over the Rhenoster River 67 miles up country; he was to drive the enemy from a position which they were reported to be holding at Honingspruit, and by keeping them continually moving, prevent them from destroying the bridge. Scarcely, however, had the General completed his preparations when the order was cancelled, leaving him time instead to inspect and examine the horses and the fresh remounts.

On arrival at Kroonstad 427 horses were found unfit for further use. For the 8th and 14th Hussars 334 remounts for 313 men came in, of which number 21 were destroyed, 65 sent to the sick depôt, and only 222 were ready for immediate service.

On Saturday the 19th the available strength of the 1st brigade was 1,034 with 795 horses (Carabiniers,

Scots Greys, and Inniskillings) as against 1,337 men and 1,195 horses who had left the Vet River on the 9th. The 4th brigade, taking the drafts and remounts into consideration, showed a strength of 719 horses as against 770 at the Vet. On that same day, the 19th, orders were received to resume the northern advance, and by the 20th the cavalry were once more on the march.

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CHAPTER IX

FROM KROONSTAD TO THE VAAL

ALL the intelligence received and the observations made on the road and in the neighbourhood of Kroonstad seemed to indicate the nearing of the end. The two States were no longer at one ; disagreement was rife among their commanders, and their quarrelling weakened, and eventually destroyed, the force of their resistance to our advance.

The cause of discontent in the Free State was clear. The policy of President Steyn had launched the country upon a line of action that had already brought suffering to his burghers. They had gone through the hardships of battle : they had seen their towns and their lands taken over and occupied ; and now they found their allies (reckless foreigners many of them) showing a total lack of consideration and ready to become their task-masters. They could only hope that, with Lord Roberts bound to the Transvaal and Pretoria, their territory would soon be clear of the invader, and that, whatever, the turn of events, the final issue of the war might not be fought out on Free State soil. Little resistance was expected from the Free Staters south of the Vaal ; but on the other hand it was probable that the Transvaal levies, taking every advantage of the natural positions lying between Kroonstad and the Vaal River, would hold them

against our advance and stave off the invasion of their country so long as possible.

From Kroonstad to Viljoen's Drift, where the railway to the north crosses the Vaal, is a distance of 80 miles. Apart from lesser obstacles, the high ridges, which overlook the Rhenoster River (associated at a later stage with disaster to our troops) offered all the elements for a stubborn defence. Parallel with the deep water-worn banks of the river and its tributary, the Honingspruit, stretched a chain of strong ramparts, well adapted to the tactics of our mobile enemy, and allowing him full scope for action against a thin line of wide frontal advance. Those Boers who had gone north massed themselves, as was anticipated, in these positions of strength that promised so much delay and difficulty to Lord Roberts and his army.

It was the winter season, when the nights on the high plains are bitter cold and the day full of sunshine, contrasts that make life on the veldt very trying; but the troops left Kroonstad keenly impatient to go forward, and rejoicing that Mr. Kruger's country was to be their goal.

Lord Roberts, continuing the policy which had availed him so well, again sent forward General French and his cavalry, supported by Hutton and his mounted troops, to pioneer the army north.

On May 19th the 1st and 4th brigades were ordered to move,[1] and were joined on the following

[1] 1ST BRIGADE: *Carabiniers*, 14 officers, 253 men, 215 horses; *Scots Greys*, 20 officers, 324 men, 289 horses; *Inniskillings* (including New South Wales Lancers), 24 officers, 379 men, 291 horses. *Total*, 1,014 of all ranks, 795 horses (to which must be added 306 which joined a few days later).

4TH BRIGADE: *7th Dragoon Guards*, 23 officers, 313 men, 215 horses; *8th Hussars*, 19 officers, 277 men, 228 horses; *14th Hussars*, 19 officers, 380 men, 276 horses. *Total*, 1,031 of all ranks, 719 horses.

Grand Total, 2,045 men and 1,820 horses.

day by Hutton's brigade of mounted infantry (about 2,500 strong) near Rhenosterkop, a prominent elevation commanding a fine view of the surrounding country.

Reports had come in that some 2,000 Boers were holding a line along the Rhenoster River, with patrols along the Honingspruit and a detachment of 200 men about 17 miles north-west of Kroonstad.

The 1st brigade, with General French, marched out from Jordan's siding and making 10 miles reached Makersvlei, where the night was spent. His orders were based on the assumption that the enemy would offer a strong resistance at Rhenoster River, and bar Lord Roberts's advance at the railway-crossing. His line of march after passing Rhenosterkop would be well to the west of the railway, and after crossing the river just below its junction with the Honingspruit would make for Prospect (Vredefort station) in the rear of the enemy, where General French was expected to arrive on the following Wednesday. Should the enemy, contrary to expectation, make a stand earlier, he was to act on his own initiative subject to limitations.

On Monday May 21st the whole column was on the march towards Welgelegen where the 1st and 4th brigades bivouacked, while Hutton's brigade spent the night at Blesboklaagte south-west of the junction of Honingspruit and Rhenoster River.

At daybreak the Carabiniers under Major Sprot, two machine-guns and a section of horse-artillery were pushed forward to secure the passage over the drift below the junction of the rivers. One squadron, reconnoitring along the spruit, found the way clear and the drift was occupied without opposition. Later Colonel Alderson with a reinforcing detachment of four

companies of mounted infantry and two pom-poms, took over the command of all the troops assembled at the drift. In the afternoon General French arrived and conducted a reconnaissance of the country north of the drift and on the further side of the Rhenoster. At the drift a long row of high kopjes hug the course of the river-bed and close from view the wide plain beyond. Detailing a squadron as advanced guard, the 1st and 4th brigades crossed the drift at half-past seven in the evening, the guns crossing between the brigades, and were followed later by Hutton's men and the baggage and supply columns under an escort of mounted infantry. Continuing their march nine miles to Roodewal farm the cavalry bivouacked for the night leaving Hutton's troops five miles to the right rear at Blesboklaagte, their camp-fires being plainly visible on the slope of the hills.

Two small Boer patrols were all that was seen of the enemy, nor was any opposition encountered from the strong position across the drift. On the farm the owners were found at home, ready to hand over arms and ammunition, and sell supplies to the troops.

At Honingspruit information was received setting down the Boer force near the railway at the Rhenoster as at the outside 2,000 strong with six guns only. Still later, Hutton received news from an intrepid scout whom he had sent out, and who had penetrated to the railway, that the whole of the Boer force had already retreated and that not a man was left to block the way. This information must have differed seriously from that in possession of the Intelligence Department, as the Commander-in-Chief contemplated a combined movement of his own force, the cavalry, and Ian Hamilton's division to force the position. General French was accordingly ordered to close on

the railway at once, so as to be able to operate on the enemy's rear when the necessity arose. Sending out Hunter-Weston at two in the afternoon with one squadron to destroy the railway, French made his own arrangements to march before daybreak next morning towards Essenbosch, intending to reach Prospect by nine, at which hour the destruction of the railway should be completed.

All fires extinguished and smoking prohibited, silently, on confidential instructions, the 1st and 4th brigades marched out at three in the morning with the batteries between them, keeping along the Essenbosch spruit in the direction of Shepstone. Hutton's mounted infantry followed, and the baggage and supply column, escorted by two companies of the former, fell in after daybreak.

After a march of 15 miles the force halted at Essenbosch. The reconnoitring detachments, one sent to Vredefort station, the other to the railway-bridge at Rhenosterspruit, reported the country clear, and the enemy gone north by rail 36 hours before, fully bearing out the information which Hutton had received. One commando, 800 strong with two guns, had entrained at Kopjes station on the morning of May 22nd; another, of the same strength under Du Preez, had passed Vredefort station in the afternoon on the previous Sunday, and had been followed by Generals Louis Botha and Schalk Burger with a big Creusot gun.

Hunter-Weston returned at nine in the morning, having found that the enemy had themselves destroyed the culverts over the spruits after their retreat, and reported that the enemy's rear-guard were halting 11 miles above Vredefort road at Grootvlei station.

The Boer resistance at the Rhenoster River had melted away, a sure indication of their state of mind and of coming developments. The necessity to push on to the railway had ceased to exist, and halting at Essenbosch General French awaited definite orders, in the hope of being permitted to carry out the plan he had in his mind. The free hand he had asked for was now readily allowed, subject only to the stipulation that he should be north of the Vaal River and Vereeniging by May 27th. The rest of the day was accordingly spent at Essenbosch, a break in the march much appreciated by both man and beast. Empty wagons and the sick were sent to the railway at Kopjes station, and final arrangements were made and preparations completed for the coming work. Mounted infantry scouts sent out by Hutton returned towards evening and reported having entered Vredefort, cut the telegraph-wires, and made prisoners of the officials. Reconnoitring up to the Vaal they had found that De Wet's Drift on the line to Potchefstroom was held by about 800 Boers, but that Schoeman's Drift, 15 miles higher up, was unoccupied. The information proved good and was timely. On the evening of Wednesday, May 23rd, divisional orders were issued as usual; but on this occasion the bare details were supplemented by a significant reference to the commander's plans, "General French intends to cross the Vaal to-morrow," and confident that he would make good his words, a spirit of keen expectation went through the ranks. At half-past six on the next morning the 1st and 4th brigades faced north and set out, followed half-an-hour later by Hutton's force, with the baggage and supply columns.

The morning struck keen, and the grey mist of frost

blurred the distance. At a trot or canter the cavalry on a wide front swung over the far-reaching downs, making due north to Parys some 15 miles ahead. Over the crest of a slight ridge vistas of broad country suddenly opened before them. Through the clearing mist rose a background of high blue hills, at first dimly and then in strong outline; to east and west on the left, some four miles distant, the houses of Vredefort showed dazzling white on the brown grass. In front, the bends of the Vaal River gleamed through wooded banks, and in one of the bends nestled the village of Parys with its tall church and tiny dwellings. The Transvaal was in sight and every heart beat fast.

Halting at Steyn Kraal south-west of the village, General French ordered a regiment to occupy the town and seize the drift, the 4th brigade following in support to Versailles north-east of Parys, some natives having reported a pont there. A little before ten reconnoitring parties found Parys free of the Boers, but brought the unwelcome news that the old crossing had fallen into decay, and though useful as a bridle-drift was impossible for wheeled traffic. The General, trusting to the Intelligence maps, which reported the drift as good for wagons, had hoped to cross the Vaal at Parys with the bulk of his column; and he was now obliged to look for a passage elsewhere.

So far his movements had completely surprised the residents of Parys. A force of 1,000 Boers at De Wet's Drift, unaware of his true line of direction, had expected a crossing there; but news travels quickly among the Boers, and that very morning our scouts had been in touch with the enemy's patrols. Discovery being unavoidable and the risk of opposition obliging action, French determined to effect a passage without delay. It was possible for horses to cross over the

rocky bed in single file for a distance of 200 yards to an island in midstream, which left some 50 yards of a deep channel to be forded to the further bank.

Dickson's brigade was the first to try the crossing, and made it with great difficulty. Their guns and vehicles were sent further up stream to Versailles, where the 1st brigade had already gone; but the pontoon there was found to have been destroyed and a passage impracticable. The next drift up the river, some 12 miles distant, was Viljoen's, not to be confounded with the drift of that name where the railway crosses the Vaal much further to the east. After receiving the surrender of the village and the arms of the residents, the remaining column pushed along on the south bank of the river towards this drift, Dickson's brigade moving on a parallel line along the north bank. The rough and stony road, edged with bush and rocks, leads along the left bank of the river to Viljoen's Drift; high kopjes jut crosswise with deep valleys, and the track is broken by dongas difficult to pass,—a place of ambush which an active enemy in small numbers could turn to disastrous account.

Advancing in sections the leaders waded through, and soon 200 men had made the passage safe for the remainder of the brigade, which forded the drift about five in the afternoon and occupying a strong position on the opposite bank was soon joined by the 4th brigade, which, as we have seen, was already on the further side. The high mountain-chain, which overlooks the river from the north is a line of length without breadth. The scrub-covered sides slope gently down to the wooded screen which lines the river-banks, and the long reaches of deep water are dotted over with many tree-grown islands.

The passage over the drift was very slow, the guns

of the horse-artillery being alone allowed to cross after the cavalry. The banks were so steep that the horses were forced to slide down on their haunches: 50 yards of rough passage over rocks and hidden holes led to an uneven top-sided landing, where several carts, following the lead of the guns, capsized into the stream; and onward from the island to the bank the rest of the passage was nearly as bad. By nightfall the General, his Staff, the entire cavalry and horse-artillery were camped on Transvaal territory, Hutton and his force with the transport remaining on the south bank for the night. Strong posts were established on the hills to the north and south of the river on every side to protect the safety of the camp. The countersign *birthday*, in commemoration of May 24th, had been issued to the troops, and Hutton from the Free State side signalled his congratulations to General French on the auspicious event of his crossing into the Transvaal on the day of the Queen's anniversary. It was felt by all that the cavalry had made good their footing in the Transvaal, and that the barrier of the Vaal had by the clever manœuvres and enterprise of their leader been effectually overcome. The night that followed was lively with an uncommon animation. The men were full of talk and laughter, every one rejoicing to feel his foot well planted on Transvaal soil after the long months of hard work and expectation; and to all the bustle of the night, thrown into exaggerated relief by the mess-fires, was added an outburst of grass-fires that licked savagely up the mountain-sides and along the river-banks in fantastic lines of flame, making a brilliant illumination of the bivouacs and even lighting the pickets clinging to their steep perches high on the hills above.

General French had occupied a strong position with an outlet to the open veldt and the north. Information was obtained from the inhabitants and prisoners that 300 Boers were holding the passage of the Vaal south of Potchefstroom at Schoeman's Drift, that 1,000 more with 14 guns were reported near Vereeniging, but without intention of making a stand; otherwise the situation bore a peaceful aspect, as the white flag was flying over the farmhouses in this part of the Transvaal. Lieutenant Rundle of the Carabiniers was at once sent by General French with a message to Headquarters. It was a dangerous ride, but he got through safely, and found Lord Kitchener at three in the morning near Kopjes station, who expressed the utmost surprise at this excellent piece of news, which he at once communicated to Lord Roberts. French's rapid movements had left him ample time for the contemplated junction with the main army north of Vereeniging on the 27th, but he was not to pursue too quickly, the enemy being reported strong at Vereeniging, and the Commander-in-Chief not due there till Saturday evening.

In his further advance he was to clear the way and co-operate with Ian Hamilton, who would reach Boschbank Drift between Lindeque Drift and Vereeniging on the afternoon of the 25th, and for this purpose French decided to move his force further upstream on the morning of that day.

The engineers were hard at work in the evening trying to clear a new drift for the wheeled transport, but there was not time to make a passage ready, and the nearness of the enemy in a mountainous country was a danger to the marching of long columns by the right bank. General French decided therefore only to bring Hutton with a portion of his

mounted infantry and his guns across, leaving the rest (Pilcher's corps of 500) to escort the baggage and supply column up-stream to Lindeque Drift, which was reported better for transport.

Hutton having relieved the cavalry on the hills north of the river, Porter's and Dickson's brigades marched at nine towards Lindeque, with the transport column keeping abreast on the left bank. There had been no opposition, save for a little skirmishing with a party of 30 or 40 Boers seen approaching from Potchefstroom at daylight. Parties of the enemy were in occupation of the hills about Lindeque, but the cavalry dislodged them without difficulty, and held the ridges north of the drift. Soon after noon the transport column reached the drift and crossed easily.

Here General French came to a halt for the day. He made Zeekoe farm his headquarters, and sent out reconnoitring parties north and east. To safeguard the column, Porter's and Dickson's brigades occupied three kopjes about three and a half miles east of the Zeekoespruit; Hutton's men held the ridge north and west of Lindeque Drift with his left resting on the Vaal three miles west of the drift, and a detachment to protect its south side.

An officer's patrol, which had been detailed to get in touch with Ian Hamilton, came up with Broadwood's brigade near Boschbank, and learned that Ian Hamilton's infantry was south of the river, some 14 miles distant. As French's position would cover Ian Hamilton's passage over the Vaal, he decided to halt there for a day and on the next morning be moving on the way to Rietspruit towards the east, in sight and well in touch with some of Ian Hamilton's troops.

At nine accordingly on the morning of May 26th

the cavalry marched to the drift across the Rietspruit. Porter, who led the way, established communication with Ian Hamilton; the transport column followed along the Vereeniging road, and was joined by Dickson's brigade and Hutton's force from their positions on the hills. By noon the crossing was effected and Vereeniging, only 12 miles off, was practically within hail. No tidings had come in of the movements of the enemy, nor was it known how far Lord Roberts had progressed. The situation required clearing up, and before resuming his own advance General French despatched Sprot and the Carabiniers towards the east to feel their way and report. From mountain gorges the country had now settled down into folds of gently rolling veldt, and the Vaal had dwindled to a sluggish ditch. Away in the distance rose the stacks of the Vereeniging collieries, while farther still the station-buildings of the town showed red above the veldt. As the Carabiniers swung along they noticed an appearance of British soldiers. It was Loch's Horse, who a few hours before, leading an advanced guard of Henry's mounted troops, had crossed into the Transvaal to find the enemy they were in search of vanished. One span of the great railway bridge, a total wreck, was the only evidence of him left. Vereeniging was ours without a struggle, while the Boers had taken road and rail northwards.

General French's advance had been more eventful. As the column was advancing up the left bank of the Rietspruit with the enemy's patrols retiring before them, about four o'clock a body of Boers holding a ridge and farm opened a hot fire upon the foremost troops. A battery of horse-artillery at once responded, while several squadrons, gallantly supported

by the New Zealand Mounted Rifles under Majors Robins and Cradock, pressed forward to close with the enemy. The Boers made no stand and fled hastily, leaving five killed on the field, nine wounded, and three prisoners including their Commandant Pienaar. With a good day's work behind them the column bivouacked at Rietspruit farm.

Awaiting further instructions, General French occupied a square up-standing height to the north of Vereeniging, commanding the railway-line and a wide view over all the surrounding country, from which, fast disappearing in a cloud of dust, some 5,000 Boers were seen making good their retreat to the north. At last he was instructed to proceed to Rietfontein, 48 miles south of the Klipriversberg, and to be 20 miles further by the morning of the 28th.

Reconnoitring squadrons were accordingly sent north, the main body of the column following soon after noon. Boers were seen on the hills along the route, but it was not till three in the afternoon that they showed any opposition. Near Doornkuil, where the spurs of the Gatsrand begin to close in on the road below, about 300 Boers opened a brisk fire with two guns and a pom-pom. Our guns came at once into action, and seeing our men dismount under cover of the fire, the enemy retired to a ridge further north. Porter's brigade went forward to seize Vlakfontein farm and the hills commanding the pass to the north. The advanced guard had not gone far along a high plateau with hills closing in upon them when a hot pom-pom fire coming from a hill south-east of the farm was directed full upon them; but a section of horse-artillery with a pom-pom, quickly picking up the range, soon silenced the enemy and sent them off in haste.

Vlakfontein farm was occupied two hours later, but the Boers still clung to the heights commanding the northern head of the pass. Dickson was sent forward to dislodge them, but the day had now worn into evening and the enemy clung obstinately to their position, though our men managed to secure a footing on the eastern extremity of the ridge. Meanwhile Porter had taken, unopposed, a hill on the right, commanding the defile from the north-east.

It was nine o'clock before the firing at last died out. A march of 30 miles and an engagement lasting from three in the afternoon till late in the evening had given the troops a long and trying day's work. But the General's object was gained, and the passage of the Gatsrand into the Klipriversberg valley practically secured. The opposition had come from Lemmer's and Grobelaar's commandos, who, arriving too late to stop our crossing at the Vaal, had raced to head us off from the strategical positions at Gatsrand. It was well that General French, instead of using caution and delay which might have meant hard fighting, disregarded the pressure on his flanks and, pushing on, snatched the head of the pass, which assured his further advance. He bivouacked with seeming indifference under the very nose of the Boer guns at Vlakfontein. Again he had gauged his enemy and felt that, completely outmanœuvred, they would be off and away to the Klipriversberg. They were gone by the next morning.

Our casualties for the two days were surprisingly slight, only two officers and seven men wounded.

On the same day news came that the main column was crossing the Vaal and halting at Vereeniging, and would march the day following, May 28th, to near Klipriver station and to Elandsfontein junction.

General French was to be early at Rietfontein to co-operate with the column in case they met with opposition on the road to Klipriver station. Ian Hamilton, following close behind the cavalry, was due at Doornkuil on the morning of the 28th, and also had orders to co-operate.

At sunrise on the 28th Dickson occupied the hill overlooking the nek on the west, which, as was foreseen, had been evacuated overnight by the enemy. Porter, with his brigade commanding the pass from the ridge on the right, reported that his patrols had pushed through the nek and had observed no movements of the enemy on the other side.

Over the nek lies, far displayed, a broad magnificence of panoramic country. From the tall Gatsrand downward rolls the Klipriver valley in a sweep of wide marsh, uplifting again to the mounting levels of the Witwatersrand, which again, where the eye cannot follow it, falls abruptly northward in steep descent. Loftily on the right stands up the massive bluff of the Klipriversberg, seemingly well within gun-range, so close it looms in sight through the clean air of winter. And then from east to west a background of white drifted heaps and slender chimneys loses itself on the sky-line far beyond.

For a moment they stood in amaze, those first British troops on mid-Transvaal soil, and looked upon the wonderful mining city built on gold,—Johannesburg, that has brought a new destiny to Africa, an unfinished book of history open before their eyes.

The fate of the mines, with their costly and complicated machinery and stored riches, hung in the balance. Had they already been sacrificed to the anger of a baffled enemy? If yet untouched, was our sudden presence to be the signal for their

destruction, or had it haply forestalled it? A rumour spread that the work of destruction was even now going forward. The line of headgear from Langlaagte to Randfontein was in view, and from one of those large mines a column of yellow smoke uprose and reports sounded as of dynamite exploding. But as the troops moved nearer, the glasses could discover nothing more than a train backing in and out of a station and a few chimney-stacks smoking after their wont.

A little later to be smothered round its base in huge veldt fires, just now the Klipriversberg looked very innocent and unprotected; and so easily down from Vanwyksrust by the bridge wound the big road direct into Johannesburg, skirting the Klipriversberg range. The very unwariness of that encouraging landscape suggested deception.

Already, at four in the morning of the 28th, Porter's brigade had been pushed forward to Rietfontein, a farm below the Gatsrand spurs, occupying on its way Vanwyksrust, a flourishing farm by Olifantsvlei Bridge and on the main road to Johannesburg. General Hutton's force coming up to take their place, the brigade pressed on over the bridge to occupy the western slopes of the Klipriversberg. About noon Hutton following in support, also crossed the bridge. The Boers rested their left and centre on the Klipriversberg; their right could only be conjectured, and called for careful search and testing.

On the afternoon of the previous day, startled by the sudden and disconcerting appearance of the cavalry, a few men from Johannesburg were hastily called together, and without blankets, kits, or provisions rode off with all despatch to the Klipriversberg. In all haste they were reinforced by a commando of about 1,200 under General Louis Botha, and still later

Lemmer and Grobelaar, foiled at the Gatsrand, availing themselves of the dark, slipped past French, and joined Botha to defend the last stronghold which blocked the way to Johannesburg. Though but a small party of 25 men in the afternoon, 2,000 Boers were now in position and ready to defy the advance of General French and his cavalry on the following morning.

Under cover of our guns, Porter's brigade, splendidly supported by Alderson's mounted infantry, advanced under a heavy fire to secure a long low ridge which, running eastward and about two miles north, commanded the approach to the bridge over which they had crossed. The opposition of the enemy had given a clue to the strength of their positions in front, but the lateral extent of their defensive line was still a mystery. Satisfied that the enemy was well held in front by Alderson and Porter, General French directed Dickson's brigade, combined with Pilcher's mounted infantry, to attempt a circuit round the enemy's right. The total force available was very small, and the success of the movement would hinge on the strength and length of the enemy's front. To the west of Olifantsvlei Bridge, and some six miles distant, the Klip River, free of bogs, is again fordable at Zuurbekom, the site of the Johannesburg water-works. After seizing this passage and effecting a crossing, the circling movement was to develope. At about half-past one the river had been crossed and the top of a broad brown slope breasted, when the enemy, from a further high sweep of ground some three miles south of Florida, ope[illegible] fire with two guns and a pom-pom to contest ou[illegible]ther advance. O. battery, quickly in action, with [illegible]ccustomed precision picking up the range, did splendid execution. The enemy's

fire soon subsided, and later it became known that one Krupp gun and the Vickers-Maxim had been disabled; but the position of these guns suggested a very long front, and a wide gap still separated our left from our right without a linking column in between. The situation was puzzling, and General French clearly realised that, unless the enemy was misleading him, a turning movement of sufficient radius could not be made with the force at his command. A high isolated hill overlooked the ridge we had just seized, by working round which, and closing up the gap, he felt the enemy would be forced to show his hand. Proceeding to describe this smaller circle, Porter's and Dickson's brigades had hardly met on the broad rise of open country, strongly held by Hutton with G. battery and Alderson's mounted infantry, when a galling cross-fire poured on our advance and rear. Ten Boer guns, including three long-rangers which had waited an opportunity to unmask, burst into furious fire from a line both wide and deep. With sharp reports of one-pound shells discharged in quick demoralising succession, heavier projectiles from Krupp and Creusots tearing up the ground in whirls of dust, the situation was sufficiently distracting, and it almost seemed as if confusion must ensue. In vain the guns of G. battery, supported by the steady rifles of the mounted infantry, strove to check the red-hot fire. But General French, with his Staff, cool and watchful as on all critical occasions, sat his horse squarely amid the rain of shell, issuing his orders and controlling the situation. He saw the movement would not succeed, and that his object must be to save his force from confusion in the odds that threatened to overwhelm them. After consultation with Hutton he decided to leave the mounted infantry in the positions to which they had

clung tenaciously throughout the day and which they had now made secure.

In the twilight of the short winter's day the two brigades of cavalry recrossed out of fire to their camp south of the Klip River. The circle made, 25 miles though it was, was yet too narrow to allow of getting round the extended Boer right, and General French realised that to hold the enemy in the centre and come behind them on a sufficiently wide outer circle would weaken his collective attacking strength and leave his force exposed to risk. Wisely he decided, when the Boers had disclosed the extent of their position, to abstain for the time from any operation involving unnecessary risks, and to await the arrival of Ian Hamilton's force, with whose support a movement on a wider axis was not only possible, but even certain of success.

Though under a constant shell fire morning and afternoon, and a concentrated cross-fire from 10 guns for four hours, the casualties were amazingly small, only two men being killed and 10 wounded in all, with 11 horses killed and wounded.

Ian Hamilton from Cypherfontein farm, six miles north of Vanwyksrust, was to march to Florida next day, the 29th, and, keeping clear of the Klip River, he intended making his way by Doornkop. The main column was moving along the railway line and hoped to occupy Elandsfontein and Germiston on the 30th. General French was directed not to enter Johannesburg, but to keep some seven or eight miles to the north. All telegraph wires on the way were to be destroyed.

The intense cold of a heavy frost that night made sleep impossible. All the ground was white, and the water ice.

Preparing the way for the day's operations the two cavalry brigades were to march up the right bank of the Klip River heading for Doornkop. Hutton was to hold the ridges seized the day before, and to dispose his troops as a pivot of manœuvre for the cavalry north and north-eastwards. Thus supported, the cavalry had to turn the enemy's right flank on the Witwatersrand ridges near Florida, and Hutton was to follow with the transport, when the movement had developed.

The two brigades crossed the Klip at Zuurbekom by the Potchefstroom road drift. The ridge north-east of the drift was still held by the outposts of the mounted infantry, but two miles away another ridge, headed by a single kopje, was occupied by the enemy in some force. From a position close to the old coaching-stables on the Potchefstroom road drift, the guns and pom-pom of Dickson's brigade opened fire, while some squadrons dismounted and made a demonstration to the east and south. By half-past ten the Boers had been dislodged and fallen back on a position immediately north.

A central ridge between two others commanding the drift was held by dismounted cavalry; and a squadron, sent to reconnoitre northward, came under so hot a fire, that General French determined to push out further westwards, and hold on to the ridges commanding the passage of the river, but to delay the actual operation till the arrival of Ian Hamilton's column. In the interval of activity the enemy directed a very heavy and accurate shell fire on our positions. Our artillery, being out of range, could not reply, but the damage done was insignificant.

Meanwhile in the Gatsrand a lively scene presented itself. Ian Hamilton's varied forces, a stream of

mounted troops, men on foot, guns and wagons rolling down the steep descent, were spreading out on the valley slopes below. Doubtless their appearance was a surprise to the defenders on the heights in front, who, not expecting such a change of scene, were busy extending their lines to a dangerous thinness, with a view to check the movement of the cavalry.

Shortly after noon Ian Hamilton's column was heading round the bend of marshy ground towards the drift. The moment had arrived, and General French ordered Porter's brigade to recross the Klip River, move up the right bank far enough to turn the enemy's right, and swing in to the Witwatersrand at Roodepoort. A little later Dickson's brigade was relieved and followed Porter's, to which Broadwood's was to be attached for the day.

The Union Jack was soon waving gaily in the foreground, heralding Ian Hamilton and his Staff as he advanced to confer with General French, whom he had not met since Thabanchu. It was decided that Hamilton should advance direct on Florida, while the cavalry operated on the enemy's right flank and rear. Leaving his colleague on the crest of the rise, French with his Staff retraced their steps towards the drift for Doornkop.

Toil-worn and travel-stained after constant hard marching and many a long day's work, yet firmly stepping forward, the Gordons and the City Imperial Volunteers led up to the rising ground, all unaware that in a few hours they would pass on into battle. Advancing up the right bank of the Klip the cavalry found the enemy extended on the left along the sloping country as far as Doornkop, reinforced but weakly from Krugersdorp. Ian Hamilton, impatient to get his front cleared, although the turning movement of the

cavalry had not yet had time to develope, threw the weight of his force in a frontal attack on to the strong positions ahead. Unable to resist the charge the enemy's centre was effectually broken, but at very heavy cost to ourselves. Scattering in rapid flight the Boers were off, many in full gallop towards the Doornkop kopjes to the support of those opposing French.

At about four in the afternoon the cavalry headed east towards Doornkop, and Ian Hamilton was hard at work shelling the ridges on Vogelstruisfontein away to the south-east. The turning movement was completed; it now remained only to drive the enemy out of the Doornkop positions, a task of little difficulty. The cavalry brought guns to a hill north-west from the ridge, and several dismounted squadrons were pushed forward in support of the attack, which in no long time sent the enemy retreating in great disorder in the direction of Roodepoort. Commandant Botha and his adjutant, with several others, were made prisoners, and more Boers, including another commandant, were seen to fall as they retired. Our horsemen followed in pursuit as far as Roodepoort, but coming under shell fire from a pom-pom and another gun placed on the tailings-heap of the Princess mine, and the sun being on the point of setting, they reined up and rejoined the rest of the column.

The troops came up over Doornkop and bivouacked for the night on the slopes by the drift, close by where Dr. Jameson and his men had surrendered three years ago. The Boers, having been driven from their positions by the turning manœuvre of the afternoon, we had pushed on to their extreme right flank, and General French, with the strong co-operation of Ian Hamilton, had opened the road to Johannesburg.

In the evening more particulars reached the camp of Ian Hamilton's engagement during the afternoon. Finding the enemy in position fronting him, he decided to attack. Crossing the open the Gordon's came under a severe fire; but nothing daunted they rushed on to the assault and swept the Boers from their holdings, losing 100 killed and wounded in the action. The total casualties of the cavalry and mounted infantry for the day were one officer and eight men wounded, and nine horses killed.

Reconnoitring detachments from Porter's and Broadwood's brigades were sent out at six the next morning towards Roodeport and west of Roodeport towards Florida, the division following three hours later.

Soon after six Roodepoort and Florida were occupied. Small parties of the enemy were still found in position near the Champ d'Or mine and the railway north-west of Roodepoort, but the advance eastward was unopposed. A mail-train was captured at Roodepoort station, and nine other trains and locomotives, with much rolling-stock, were cut off on the Klerksdorp-Johannesburg line.

Pushing on north-eastwards over very rocky country, and leaving Florida on their right, the division moved along that part of the Johannesburg main road which edges the Witwatersrand range, dropping sheer before the great billowy stretches of smooth downs which reach to the Magaliesberg and Pretoria. A few Boers were retiring northwards, and one larger party of about 600 could be seen clearing away by Boskop Hill. Eastward lay Johannesburg, over high sloping ground commanded by the fort above it.

General French decided to take the cavalry well out of range of fire, off the main road down into the

plain by Weltevreden farm to Klipfontein farm. Hutton continued a little north-east, and striking a road better suited for wheeled transport came on direct to Klipfontein, six miles north-west of Johannesburg. Presently espying a convoy along the road leading to Pretoria, he made a dash forward, came in touch with the rearguard, drove it eastward, and captured a three-inch Austrian gun, 24 wagons full of ammunition and stores, and a German commandant with 71 prisoners were also taken. Soon after two a halt for the day was called at Klipfontein.

The troops gazed before them at Johannesburg against the high horizon-line, at the banked-up fort and the house-roofs outlined on the ridge of the plateau just above the town. Groups of watchers collected and passed to and fro. Why did not the fort play its part and burst forth into fire? The silence was significant. Across the high ground, and from a kopje half way distant to Johannesburg, rode horsemen in twos and threes eastward to the new Pretoria road. Within 3,000 yards' range our guns opened fire, and away galloped the riders, most of them making good their escape.

Communication was established in the afternoon with Gordon's brigade attached to the centre column and marching in the direction of the dynamite factory, 10 miles distant from General French's headquarters across the veldt. The main column was in occupation of Elandsfontein, and next morning the welcome news came in that the Commander-in-Chief had demanded and obtained the surrender of Johannesburg, and on Thursday, May 31st, at noon he made his official entry into the town.

On Friday, June 1st, the cavalry marched across and bivouacked two miles south of where the Pretoria

road crosses the Yokeskei River at Berg Vlei, 10 miles north of Johannesburg. On the same high road, a few miles out of Johannesburg, at Orange Grove, Lord Roberts had established his headquarters, and General French had ridden over to him there and conferred with the Chief of the Staff.

It was believed that the British prisoners were to be removed early by rail from Pretoria that night, and anxious to prevent that removal the Commander-in-Chief was desirous that the line should be cut in that direction. A railway-bridge on the Delagoa Bay line crossing the Bronkhurst Spruit some 50 miles distant, or the one at the Wilge River, about as far off, was to be destroyed. This task was allotted to Hunter-Weston, and Burnham was to accompany him. Presuming that the bridge might be guarded, a detachment of 200 men on picked horses with four engineers were detached to support the operation. Ninety men each from the 9th and 16th Lancers, 20 from the 14th Hussars, 200 in all, with 20 reserve horses, under Captains Willoughby and MacEwan set out at half-past eight in the evening, with Hunter-Weston and Burnham, and marched eastwards, leading the horses, by Zuurfontein and Bapstfontein. By daylight they had covered 20 miles undetected by the enemy, when a halt was made in the hollow by Bapstfontein farm, and Burnham went forward to reconnoitre. Ahead, at the foot of some kopjes forming the boundary of the plain of Bapstfontein, lay three farms. But already they were discovered, for a Boer patrol moving westward had perceived the little force, and a troop of our horse, which rode out to cut the enemy off, was soon outdistanced. As the morning dawned big columns of smoke were seen rising from the farms, and to each

farm scouts were busy galloping in. Evidently Hunter-Weston had run upon a laagered commando in the night and would have to retire at once.

No sooner was the order given than the Boers poured out and fired heavily on the small force. Taking advantage of the rise and fall of the ground, Hunter-Weston made a running fight from one position to another, his centre hard pressed and his flanks not less threatened. The Boers were in far superior numbers, and recognising that he could not escape eventual envelopment, Hunter-Weston sent Burnham for support, while he took up a defensive position and awaited relief. Losing no time over his plans he pressed into service a convenient Kaffir kraal on the slope of a kopje, and began to fit up his little improvised fort. Cautiously the Boers crept up in skirmishing lines, when suddenly, for no obvious reason and to the astonishment of the defenders, they retired, and enabled our men to get away without further harm. The object of the expedition had failed, but the display of coolness and resource had averted capture and surrender.

One officer, Lieutenant Pollok, and one trooper of the 9th Lancers were killed, three officers and nine men wounded. It may be questioned whether such an enterprise undertaken with 200 men could have hoped to succeed. It was necessary to march both night and day, unseen by an enemy who was bent on rapidly passing across to the north. A few men might have threaded their way in obscurity, particularly if they had trusted to the concealment and guidance of spruits and river-beds; but with our imperfect knowledge of the country and the Boer's quick intelligence, it was scarcely possible for a large party to slip by unobserved. Also it may be urged that where a few

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NERAL FRENCH'S MARCH FROM BLOEMFONTEIN TO KROONSTAD.

1. THE CAVALRY DIVISION CROSSING THE VET RIVER ON THE WAY TO KROONSTAD.

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GENERAL FRENCH'S MARCH FROM KROONSTAD TO THE VAAL RIVER.

2. GENERAL FRENCH'S ENTRY INTO PARYS.

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ADVANCE FROM BLOEMFONTEIN TO PRETORIA.

1. ON THE POINT OF OPERATIONS.

2. THE LANDDROST SURRENDERING THE KEYS OF KROONSTAD TO LORD ROBERTS.

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GENERAL FRENCH'S MARCH FROM KROONSTAD TO THE VAAL RIVER.

1. FRENCH'S SCOUTS BREAKING UP SURRENDERED ARMS.

2. THE CAVALRY BAGGAGE COLUMN ON THE ROAD BETWEEN PARYS AND VILJOEN'S DRIFT ACROSS THE VAAL RIVER.

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GENERAL FRENCH.

1. GENERAL FRENCH CROSSES THE VAAL RIVER INTO TRANSVAAL TERRITORY ON MAY 24, 1900.

2. OUTSIDE KROONSTAD: GENERAL FRENCH AND HIS CHIEF STAFF OFFICER, COLONEL D. HAIG.

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COLONEL ALDERSON AND SOME OF THE MOUNTED INFANTRY CROSSING THE VAAL RIVER AT VILJOEN'S DRIFT.

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FRENCH'S CAVALRY ON THE MARCH.

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GENERAL FRENCH'S MARCH FROM KROONSTAD TO JOHANNESBURG.

GENERAL FRENCH

1. THE ENGINEERS AT WORK ROAD MENDING.

2. GENERAL FRENCH AND STAFF TAKING OBSERVATIONS FROM THE GATSRAND.

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GENERAL FRENCH'S MARCH FROM KROONSTAD TO JOHANNESBURG.

ACTION AT KLIPRIVERSBERG, N. OF VAN WYK'S RUST.

1. THE CAVALRY UNDER SEVERE SHELL FIRE.

2. SHELLS BURSTING AMONG THE CAVALRY.

3. THE CANADIANS COMING UNDER SHELL FIRE.

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GENERAL FRENCH'S MARCH FROM KROONSTAD TO JOHANNESBURG.

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1. MEETING BETWEEN GENERAL FRENCH AND GENERAL IAN HAMILTON AT THE KLIPRIVERSBERG.

2. THE CAVALRY CROSSING THE WITWATERSRAND.

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GENERAL FRENCH'S MARCH FROM KROONSTAD TO JOHANNESBURG.

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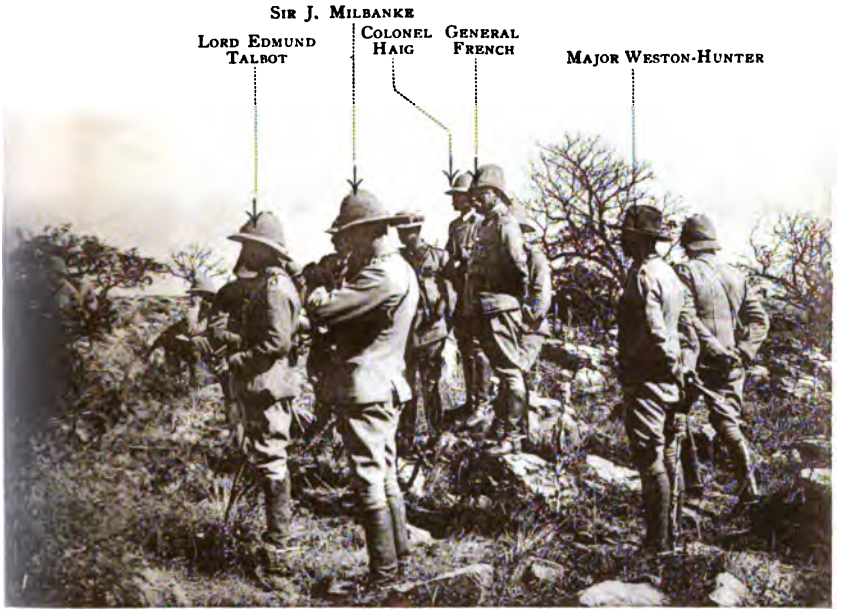

1. GENERAL FRENCH WATCHES THE ENGAGEMENT AT DOORNKOP.

2. TRANSPORT OF THE 1st BRIGADE ON THE MAIN WITWATERSRAND ROAD, NEAR JOHANNESBURG.

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1, 2. GUNS PASSING THE ROODEPOORT GOLD MINES OF THE WITWATERSRAND.

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GÉNERAL FRENCH'S MARCH FROM KROONSTAD TO JOHANNESBURG.

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DESTROYING THE POTCHEFSTROOM-JOHANNESBURG LINE NEAR ROODEPOORT ON THE WITWATERSRAND.

1. LAYING THE CHARGE.
2. THE EXPLOSION.
3. THE RESULT.

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GENERAL FRENCH CROSSES THE RIDGES OF THE WITWATERSRAND TO THE NORTH BY A STONY AND STEEP TRACK.

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GENERAL FRENCH'S MARCH FROM JOHANNESBURG TO PRETORIA.

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men failed a larger number might have succeeded; and had General French been ordered to put forward his whole force, matters might have shaped otherwise.

General French's name had won a prestige that was able to shake the Boer and his purpose. We have their own admission that they were outwitted and undone by the puzzling unexpectedness of his advance and his skilful flanking movements. To his quickness and ingenuity they attributed the frequent defeat of their plans, the abandonment of strong well-defended positions, and the early surrenders of Kroonstad, the Vaal, and Johannesburg.

After a day of welcome rest at Berg Vlei, General French and his division were once more on the march for Pretoria.

CHAPTER X

FROM JOHANNESBURG TO PRETORIA

WHEN the cavalry had crossed the Witwatersrand boundary they left Johannesburg on their right and struck off north-east towards Pretoria.

Hitherto General French and his command had occupied a position on the left flank of the main column; but now this unexpected transverse move from west to east looked like an exchange of position from the left to the right flank of the army,—a move that indicated an appreciation of opportunity, turning to instant account the condition of the enemy, disorganised and broken in spirit before the impetus of Lord Roberts's advance north. Perhaps it was this change of position that gave rise to the impression that the Commander-in-Chief, leaving Johannesburg aside, contrary to the Boers' expectation, as strategically unimportant, had planned to march straight on Pretoria, and send the cavalry to the north-east. Their task would be to throw themselves across the Delagoa Bay line, and interrupt the enemy's communications between Pretoria and the east.

But Lord Roberts had made other dispositions. He had decided first on the surrender of Johannesburg, and next on the seizure and occupation of Pretoria.

Many contradictory rumours came in of the intentions of the enemy. They were removing guns, and

we should have a free walk into the capital, and again they would make an obstinate defence. Certainly, they had shifted their government, and were carrying supplies, rolling-stock, &c., eastward.

Since the great scene at Paardeberg the demoralisation of the enemy's commandos had been everywhere evident. Not a single determined stand had placed serious obstacles in the way of our advancing army, and from towns along the line one tiding after another confirmed the Free Staters' disgust with the war, and that alone and single-handed the Transvaal Boers would not long hold out against the presence of our troops in their midst. Lord Roberts would have been fully justified in believing, in common with his army and the world without, that whether the enemy was disheartened and prepared to offer only a feeble resistance, or whether he would oppose a last desperate stand, the hoisting of the British flag in Pretoria was essential to any negotiations for peace. Perhaps such an argument may have influenced him to hasten the occupation of Pretoria, and in order to avert more bloodshed in a futile resistance intentionally to leave open a gap of escape east of that town. And yet it is difficult to understand what purpose the cavalry could serve by taking the north-westerly route across extremely rough and mountainous country; for, had the enemy been there in force, French was not strong enough to break through. And again, if the enemy was not there to oppose him, it did not seem clear why that line should have been chosen at all.

The main column was to push on from the south, Ian Hamilton to close round south-west and west, keeping in touch with General French's division, which had orders to work round to the north with his left resting on the Pietersburg railway. On June 4th

the main column hoped to reach Vlakplaats on the north bank of Hennopsriver, or Six Mile Spruit (being that distance from Pretoria); Ian Hamilton was to be 10 miles west of Pretoria on the Witwatersberg at Elandsfontein, and General French was expected, after his north-westerly movement, to turn eastward through the Magaliesberg, and push across to the Pietersburg line, well north of Pretoria. His orders were to cover Ian Hamilton's force, which was to get a footing on the Witwatersberg out of range of Daspoort Fort, 11,000 yards due west of Pretoria.

The marching strength of the division was as follows:—

1ST BRIGADE: *Carabiniers*, 17 officers, 289 men, 251 horses; *Scots Greys*, 18 officers, 302 men, 308 horses; *Inniskillings*, 27 officers, 268 men, 224 horses; *T Battery Royal Horse Artillery*, 6 officers, 138 men, 154 horses; *two pom-poms*, 1 officer, 15 men, 17 horses. *Total*, 1,182 of all ranks, 954 horses.

4TH BRIGADE: *7th Dragoon Guards*, 21 officers, 272 men, 139 horses; *8th Hussars*, 18 officers, 299 men, 158 horses; *14th Hussars*, 14 officers, 297 men, 187 horses; *Battery Royal Horse Artillery*, 5 officers, 115 men, 108 horses; *one pom-pom*, 1 officer, 12 men, 26 horses. *Total*, 1,054 of all ranks, 618 horses.

Grand Total, 2,236 men and 1,572 horses.

In addition to the cavalry General Hutton's mounted force of approximately 2,300 was under General French's command.

For some days previous to the general advance the country had been thoroughly reconnoitred for 12 miles north of the Yokeskei River; and early on the morning of June 3rd General French crossed the Little Yokeskei at Leeuwkop, advancing north-west by way of Diepkloof and Rietfontein. Shortly before noon he crossed the Crocodile, where he called a halt, finding a good supply of forage at the store on the left bank of the river.

A reconnoitring squadron reported a large Boer convoy moving northwards about five miles distant,

and the advanced troops were fired on by some of the enemy on a ridge two miles north-west of Roodeval. The 1st brigade was sent forward to engage the enemy in front and threaten his left, while the 4th made a wide turning movement west round the enemy's right. Porter's guns came into action against the ridge on the west of the road, and with such effect that by the time a detachment of mounted infantry under Alderson, supporting Porter, were about to push forward, the enemy withdrew.

On the other side of the Crocodile River the landscape entirely changes. No longer do we find the broad waves of country between Johannesburg and Pretoria, but high uplands and hills, the outposts of yet loftier heights beyond the Witwatersberg and Magaliesberg mountain-ranges. Hill and vale are close set with a stunted growth of thick brushwood and rough bush-trees. Parallel to the Crocodile valley, but some distance west, the road makes a bend into the main thoroughfare between Rustenberg and Pretoria. It runs through a difficult country full of scrub-grown kopjes and boulders intersected with deep spruits; and then, with occasional glimpses of the open country away to the east and west, it plunges into a mountain medley, a precarious and treacherous country for cavalry operations.

General French pressed anxiously forward, forcing the enemy back from ridge to ridge. They were part of Du Toit's commando returning from Fourteen Streams, about 1,200 dismounted and 500 mounted men; but 50 men, had they so determined, might have kept any number of invading horsemen at bay in those relentless hills.

The transport could make but indifferent progress, and some fell far behind. General French directed

Hutton to bivouac three miles north of Roodeval for their protection, while the cavalry pushed forward to seize the crossing of the Crocodile near Welgegund.

At half-past four, after 38 miles of march, the advanced guard reached Kalkheuvel, where natives had reported Boers and their wagons in the neighbourhood. The road, skirting a rocky hill on the left, followed the downward slope, and hills closed in narrowing the onward way. To the right the rugged slope dropped away to a big hill commanding the pass. Two squadrons of the Carabiniers were despatched up a slope leading to the big hill, which was found held by the enemy, and another squadron was sent to occupy a hill on the left of the road: between them moved the advanced guard, and down the road its advanced patrol. Only one hour of daylight remained, and as the evening seemed to have vanished, the officer, commanding the advanced patrol, pushed on, and seeing two abandoned wagons a mile ahead, was moving towards them.

Meanwhile, a patrol of a non-commissioned officer and two men, which had been sent on foot a short way up a hill on the left, had discovered some Boers lining the hill in ambuscade designed to entrap the cavalry. Not till the patrol had given the alarm did the Boers take action, and then they poured a hot fire upon the road, under which Lieutenant Rundle's patrol lost two men killed and three wounded, he himself having three horses shot under him. A little further back the troops wondered as they plodded on their way. A shell whizzed by in the twilight from whence no one knew, and then another, leaving no doubt of mischief in the immediate neighbourhood. These were followed by a rifle volley, a cloud of dust, and a smashing

clatter of hoofs as some horsemen of the advanced guard galloped back to their friends.

General French, keenly anxious to reach the open plain before nightfall, had pushed on with all haste with his Staff. At Kalkheuvel he found himself alongside his advanced troops, and meeting Porter, questioned him of the country ahead.

Too hastily had the General pushed on. Porter was just replying that he had been barely allowed time to search and clear the country, when a shell whizzed through the air with a crashing report, followed by frantic Mauser-volleys. There was a moment of confusion. Under the first shock of bullets, the scouts dashed back on to the General and Staff, and up from behind came crowding in the cavalry and some mounted infantry. Close after the patrol along the road, always nearer and nearer every moment, rushed the enemy's bullets, and from the hill on the right a terrible Mauser-hail drove into the blocked mass of horsemen.

Quietly, in complete mastery of the situation, General French gave his orders. "Make room for the guns," passed down the line; and like a fire-engine to the rescue up dashed a section of horse-artillery and a pom-pom. Realising the situation, General Hutton took up a position in support, and despatched Alderson in haste with his Canadians to the front. The Carabiniers and Canadians dismounted, charged on foot up the hill on the left, and supporting the guns opened hot volleys on to the direction of the firing. Gun and Mauser in fierce and full bombardment, and the angry answer back, echoed and resounded in that deadly hill-engirdled hollow. At last night came, but before night came victory. Masters of the ridges right and left the cavalry

commanded the defile and free entry into the open plain. The Boer fire, though at close range and directed upon our crowded troops, had done marvellously little damage. Three men killed and one officer and five men wounded, with 14 horses killed and six wounded were the extent of our casualties. It was a day of trial to the troops, and admirably had they proved themselves in the soldiers' qualities of quick response and unwavering action.

The advance was resumed next morning, June 4th, but was temporarily delayed for supplies, which, however, did not arrive.

Later information went to show that General French had nearly caught the Boer convoy at Kalkheuvel. It was to enable this convoy to escape, and to check for the day the cavalry's advance, that the Boers took up the position at Kalkheuvel, which they had now completely abandoned.

Porter's brigade advanced to secure a drift across the Crocodile River, where it sweeps round by Welgegund at the foot of the hill, for the transport to cross, but eventually it was not used.

In the morning news arrived that the main army was moving direct on Pretoria and expected no determined resistance.

Ian Hamilton, who had hitherto maintained touch with French, now left the cavalry division, and branched off along the road between Krugersdorp and Pretoria. Meanwhile General French pursued his advance, taking the road leading over the pass up a very steep hill near Broederstoom, and down into the fertile Magaliesberg valley. Several wagons left by the wayside showed that the Boers had found journeying in these rough unkept places difficult. We, too, experienced much trouble with our transport,

and even the wagons with double spans were sometimes hours lumbering up a bit of broken ground.

Over the pass below lay a piece of country very fair to look upon. A long roll of broad smooth valley stretches east to Pretoria, flanked by the Magaliesberg and the Witwatersberg, two strong and lofty lines of mountain-chain. Close on our left is the lovely valley of the Broederstroom, with a wealth of orange-groves and goodly growing things.

Brushing aside by a flanking movement and a few shells some slight opposition from the neighbouring kopjes, the force reached Broederstroom. As they passed along, the thirsty men, with joyful eagerness, plucked at the firm cool oranges clustering heavily upon the boughs, showing clear gold against the depth of intense green foliage and the blue sky above. The bridge over the Crocodile River, on the Rustenberg road, took them to Schoemansrust, which was occupied at two in the afternoon.

One mile further, at the farm of General Schoeman whom we had fought and baffled for ten weeks at Colesberg, the General decided to spend the night.

The 1st brigade had seized Zilikats Nek over the Magaliesberg before darkness fell, and was firmly established on the right bank of the Crocodile. The 4th brigade and the mounted infantry remained on the left bank.

On the next morning, June 5th, the cavalry crossed the valley and passed over the Magaliesberg by a long gently rising road through Zilikats Nek. They marched eastward, on the north side of the mountain-range; Hutton and his force, slightly in the rear but to the south, held the passes in succession and maintained communication, while reconnoitring squadrons were out north-east to Wonderboom and

was also to be the camping-ground of Hutton and his command, who, with the transport, were already on their way thither. General French, who had been at Wonderboom since nine in the morning, rode off into Pretoria with his Staff, and established his headquarters in the town.

TRANSPORT CROSSING THE CROCODILE RIVER.

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THE CAVALRY CROSSING THE CROCODILE RIVER.

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THE CANADIANS CROSSING THE CROCODILE RIVER.

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GENERAL FRENCH'S MARCH FROM JOHANNESBURG TO PRETORIA BY THE N.W.

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1, 2. GUNS CROSSING THE CROCODILE RIVER.

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GENERAL FRENCH'S MARCH TO PRETORIA BY THE N.W.

1. GIVING HORSES A FEED AT KALKEUVEL, WHERE THE CAVALRY HAD BEEN HELD UP BY THE ENEMY.

2. APPROACHING PRETORIA—THE MAIN BODY ON THE ROAD AND FLANKING PARTIES BY THE SLOPES OF THE HILL.

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GENERAL FRENCH'S MARCH TO PRETORIA BY THE N.W.

1. CAVALRY IN THE KALKEUVEL DEFILE.

2. CAVALRY PASSING OVER THE KALKEUVEL PASS.
Dust clouds raised along line of march betray our presence to the enemy.

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CAVALRY ON THE MARCH.

1. COLONEL PORTER'S BRIGADE, WITH THE NEW SOUTH WALES LANCERS LEADING.

2. A HALT.

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1. THE CAVALRY ON THE MARCH.

2. PORTER'S TRANSPORT CROSSING THE AAPIES RIVER ON THE WAY TO WATERVAL.

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GENERAL FRENCH'S MARCH N.W. TO PRETORIA.

SCENES ON THE RELIEF OF BRITISH PRISONERS AT WATERVAL.

1. GOING OUT TO MEET THE CAVALRY.

2. MAKING THEIR WAY THROUGH BARBED WIRE ENTANGLEMENTS.

3. ON THEIR WAY TO PRETORIA.

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APPROACHING PRETORIA BY WONDERBOOM POORT FROM THE N.W.

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CHAPTER XI

DIAMOND HILL

THE bulk of the enemy, when they abandoned Pretoria, retired east by the Delagoa Bay line, but numbers of them still remained in the hill country about 15 miles from the town.

The two parallel mountain-chains from the west of Pretoria turn in a south-easterly direction as they pass the town, widening as they go, and at last lose themselves in scattered spurs giving excellent cover to the retreating Boers. Through the hills there are outlets north, made by the river courses that force their way by gaps, or poorts as they are called. The first outlet east of Pretoria is Koedoespoort, the camp selected for the cavalry; beyond this the railway divides the steep hill-chain at Pienaarspoort, which the enemy were reported to be holding with 1200 men and several guns.

Dickson was instructed to cover Pretoria to the east with a line of outposts, while General French's division was transferred on June 8th from Koedoesdrift to a new camp at Kameeldrift six miles north-east. Strong patrols were sent out north to Haaglaagte, north-west to Doornpoort, and west to Wonderboom. They were fired upon slightly three miles to the south-east, but otherwise discovered no traces of the enemy.

Lord Roberts, engaged in peace negotiations with Louis Botha, sent the cavalry stringent orders to abstain from all such operations as might provoke response or attack from the enemy. The negotiations were broken off, and Lord Roberts, wishing to disembarrass himself and Pretoria, decided to drive the Boers from Pienaarspoort eastwards, and gain possession of the hill positions alongside, and the railway beyond to Elands River station. The plan of attack was to be a turning movement of both flanks of the enemy conducted by the cavalry and mounted infantry. The movement well in progress, the infantry were to come on and pressing the enemy in front dislodge them. General French was to turn the Boers' north flank by a wide movement, taking him past Kameelfontein 18 miles north-east of Pretoria and east to Doornkraal 12 miles north of the railway. There he was to drop south of the railway line at Witfontein and join hands with the mounted troops working round the enemy's south flank. The 11th division, under Pole-Carew, with a mounted infantry corps attached, was to operate in the centre, and Ian Hamilton's division with Gordon's and Broadwood's brigades on the right. It was a bold conception, the flanks of our attacking force being 20 miles apart.

At that time the infantry was at Garsfontein six miles south-east of Pretoria, the mounted troops at Zwavelpoort six miles further in the same direction.

Wishing to march unencumbered, since his turning operation must cover roughly some 30 miles at least, French took with him two days' supplies and ordered the transport and ammunition columns south by the Middelburg road to follow the infantry division. His whole force, consisting of Porter's and Dickson's

brigades, with Hutton's mounted infantry, numbered but 1,590 men, with 12 guns and three Vickers-Maxim quick-firing guns; an insufficient force, as was to be proved later, to make successful headway against an enemy estimated at 4,000 men and 16 guns in their formidable positions. To obtain a footing on the ridges partly occupied by the enemy, to hold them under a deadly shell and musketry fire on front and flank for two days, and to prevent the enemy from getting round in rear of the main force, was a piece of work demanding the highest excellence from such a handful of troops.

It was on Monday, June 11th, that General French proceeded to carry out his orders. The direction was north-east into the low lying valley of the Pienaars River, which is intersected by numerous watercourses leading into the main stream. To the east the country becomes broken and hilly, with scattered kopjes rocky and overgrown with bush, and gradually rising up to the Crocodilespruit further east. Between the two rivers lay the battle-ground fiercely contested for two days by French and Delarey's opposing forces, part of the widespread operations known as Diamond Hill. The exact scene of the fight was on the verge of a level plain two and a half miles wide between the river-beds of the Kameelspruit, a tributary of the Pienaars' and the Crocodilespruit, shut in on the north by the Bockenhoutskloof hills and the Kameelfontein ridge on the south. The latter ridge falls abruptly into the valley on the farther side of the Kameelspruit, and extends on a broad plateau rolling away to the south-east. The north-western extremity, abutting on the Kameelfontein Drift, rises steep and rocky into a pointed, bushy cone about 400 feet high known as Louwbaken,

and practically commands the plain of the whole ridge and a wide stretch of country round. The ridge is divided by a deep depression from its extension on the north side facing the plain, and the extension culminates on the east in a rocky kopje thickly overgrown with bush and high grass, known as Stony Hill. The southern extremity is the only other feature. Louwbaken was held by our force, Stony Hill and the southern extremity by the Boers. The road from Kameeldrift farm, which crosses the Kameelspruit by a bad drift below Louwbaken, follows by the plain along the north slope of the ridge. Opposite, on the northern side of the plain, rise the Bockenhoutskloof hills, at first held by the Boers; but afterwards the western group was gained and held by us, when the homestead Roodeplaats, which nestles against the spur close on the Kameelspruit, became the headquarters of General French and his Staff. At five o'clock on the morning of Monday, June 11th, General French moved out from camp, the 4th brigade leading the way. The darkness was extreme and the air hung clammy. Taking a north-easterly direction, the advanced guard of the 4th brigade crossed the Pienaar River at Kameelfontein Drift unopposed. Scarcely had they passed a mile beyond the drift along the road winding round Louwbaken, when they were fired upon by a number of Boers from one of the Bockenhout ridges to the north-east, and the rest of the division which, keeping close under the lee of the ridge, had now joined them, also found themselves checked by the same severe fire at close range.

It was clear that the Boers occupied both sides of the plain. Dickson's brigade, engaged by the enemy, had just reached an exposed position, insecure for mounted troops, for they were over the river with

a bad crossing at their back. General French, who was on the spot, saw the risk of hesitation and the need for instant action. He ordered the brigade to dismount, return the fire, and push on. The Boer lines were to be threatened in their turn. A Vickers-Maxim and some other guns, ordered up on the left of the brigade, came into action and took the pressure off Dickson. The enemy, probably unwilling in their forward position to meet French's combined force, fell back one mile into safety on Stony Hill, or Crocodile-spruit, as it has been named. Hutton, seeing the cavalry heavily engaged, hurried up his brigade, and was in time to render valuable co-operation in the development which followed. He sent forward Alderson with his three companies of mounted infantry under Captain Amphlett, the Canadian Mounted Rifles, and some New Zealand Mounted Rifles, in support on the right of Dickson. Alderson made straight for Louwbaken, and climbing the steep rocks of the hillside, succeeded in effecting an important lodgement, a commanding though exposed position on Dickson's right rear.

Dickson, Alderson, the guns, and Porter between Dickson and the drift, were under heavy shell and Mauser fire from the north-east and south; and it was now certain that the Boers commanded three out of the four sides of the Kameelfontein valley. General French saw that his only chance of successful operation lay in turning the Boer right by a flanking movement round the Bockenhout position. Dickson was to push forward, and hold the enemy in front along Stony Hill, with Alderson in support and Pilcher in reserve at the foot of Louwbaken; while Porter was to be engaged on the turning movement, having in support the mounted infantry with four guns

on a ridge by the Kameelspruit on the north side of the plain.

The moment Porter's brigade turned to cross over by the plain towards the Bockenhout position, the Boer guns from Stony Hill opened a heavy fire on them. Quickening their pace they went on in a wide detour to outflank the enemy from the far side of the hills. Locating them in a strong position on the most westerly ridge, Porter attacked, and with courage and determination succeeded in dislodging them; and then, as they withdrew to ridges further east, he slipped his brigade into the vacated posts, which enabled him to enfilade the enemy on Stony Hill. An overwhelming fire and the lateness of the hour rather interfered with the full success of Porter's attempt, and prevented him from pushing the enemy from the hills near by; but the position won was of material advantage, as it allowed General French to control and check the Boer right. Alderson did his best to direct his main force against the ememy's post at Stony Hill, and Dickson made a great effort to gain ground, being splendidly supported by a Canadian officer who, himself a target for the Boers, worked a Colt gun all day almost without intermission. But try as they all might, it was impossible to make headway, and to keep their ground was as much as they could manage. On front and flank came a severe fire from Bockenhout and Stony Hill, heavy shelling from two long-range guns near Edendale north-east of Pienaarspoort, and from a Vickers-Maxim at close range off the south-eastern end of Kameelfontein ridge still held by the enemy.

Only once, shortly after noon, did the fire slacken during the day. Hutton, thinking the moment had come for the foremost troops to press

home a direct attack, ordered up Pilcher's corps who were in reserve at the back. They came along in extended formation, but were soon stopped by the fire which was renewed with fury and continued till dark. A considerable fire was also directed along the whole length of the Kameeldrift, and on the tin house alongside into which our wounded had been carried; while the road leading from the drift bordering Louwbaken was so swept by bullet and shell that it became a lane of death to any man or animal venturing down it. There was no mistaking the Boer strength or their intentions.

Drawn up in force against Dickson and the mounted infantry was Delarey on the Kameelfontein ridge, while Snyman faced Porter. Their strong positions and the superior number of their guns in action on our front and flanks would have made our foothold untenable but for the practical way our men set to work throwing up schantzes, and in all ways seeking and making cover.

General French could scarcely feel much confidence that the slender force at his disposal could turn a powerful and vigorously resisting enemy out of their fine positions in a country suited to them in every respect. Seeing that progress was impossible, he was satisfied to hold on overnight to the positions that his troops had made good by day, and to rely on the centre and right main columns under Pole-Carew and Ian Hamilton making such impression on the enemy as would react on those Boers opposing him, oblige them to relax their resistance, and give him an opportunity of seizing the initiative and eventually completing his turning movement.

Considering the heavy fire the losses for the day were relatively slight, numbering only two officers

and 10 men wounded including Major Hatherway, R.A.M.C. The great expenditure of large and small ammunition obliged General French to order the return of his ammunition column, which had that morning joined the 11th division.

At the close of day discouraging news arrived. Broadwood had failed to turn Botha's south flank, and should the enemy continue in force he and French were to give up the attack and retire rather than risk the loss of many men. But French, believing that his retirement would increase the pressure on Ian Hamilton's and Pole-Carew's front and flank, determined to hold on at all hazards.

The efforts of the infantry that day had also been unavailing. The Boers' position extended from south to north. Louis Botha's extreme left rested on Tygerpoort ridge, part of the long chain running south-east from Pretoria, parallel to the line of ridges some eight miles north. Across these northern ridges lay the Boer centre at Rhenosterfontein (Diamond Hill), and about 10 miles still further north was their right flank opposed to French. Pole-Carew, with the 11th division at Hatherley and Zwartkopjes, and a fringe of mounted infantry under Henry thrown well out north-west towards Bavianspoort to guard his left flank, operated towards Pienaarspoort and held the Boer centre; while Ian Hamilton, with Bruce Hamilton's infantry brigade, mounted infantry, and the 2nd and 3rd cavalry brigades, attacked the Boer right. As they advanced through Zwavelfontein towards Tygerpoort they found the ridge was held. Ian Hamilton sent forward the 16th Lancers, which, with two horse-artillery guns occupied the hills south of the poort, and held the enemy, thus allowing a free passage to the rest of the force.

While this movement was in progress, the 17th Lancers were sent to occupy the kopjes a few miles north of the poort; and it was here, coming to the support of Q. battery, hard pressed by the enemy, that the charge of the 12th Lancers and Household Cavalry took place in which Lord Airlie (commanding the 12th), Major the Hon. Lionel Fortescue, and Lieut. the Hon. Charles Cavendish (both of the 17th), with 17 men fell as they reformed to retire.

Tygerpoort passed, Ian Hamilton advanced with his infantry against the main position, leaving Gordon's brigade to cover his right rear and Broadwood's his right flank. But the enemy, estimated at 12,000 strong, taking a lesson from experience, had thrown their weight on both flanks, causing danger to French and Hamilton. Their attempt was to outflank us, and they so far succeeded that Hamilton, like French, could make no headway, and found himself obliged to halt his force in the position he held at dark.

General French must have passed the night in anxious foreboding. He must have feared lest the enemy, encouraged by the result of the day and aware of the weakness of Lord Roberts's left, should have brought up overnight reinforcements strong enough to threaten his flanks seriously.

Day broke in silence, and from the east came no indication of events nor any sound of guns. With the first light the outposts reported that the Boers still retained their positions, and instead of diminishing their activity were engaged in energetic preparations to oust us from the ground we had already won. Reinforcements were also going up Crocodilespruit Hill and the adjoining kopjes. Bringing up some of their guns from the Edendale positions they opened a

hot fire on the side of Kameelfontein ridge, which was held by the mounted infantry. Three times in succession Alderson attempted to push forward, but each time he found the fire too heavy, and soon every gun and rifle were in full action again at every point.

Meanwhile Porter had reported that a detachment of Boers had slipped round towards the west with the evident intention of turning the cavalry flank. Immediately General French pushed out a detachment of mounted infantry north-west to Klopperbosch adjoining Bockenhout four miles to the south-west. By this move he successfully frustrated the enveloping designs of the enemy, and blocking their advance compelled the outflanking party to fall back.

As the day wore on the enemy's fire grew more furious. Already 13 guns were in action, and in the afternoon four more were added, two of them Vickers-Maxims, while from the open, away near Edendale, a long-range Creuzot gun was hurling 100-pound shells at Alderson and Dickson. Each time the gun fired all the men about it disappeared into cover, leaving one companion behind to do the work and bear the necessary risk.

General French, believing he saw a way of diverting the enemy's fire, sent forward Allason's battery into action. Avoiding the drift, Allason had crossed over by Roodeplaats farm, past the divisional headquarters, to some high ground looking towards Edendale. The plan succeeded; Allason soon drew the Boer fire upon his guns, but his men stood their ground firmly and fortunately suffered little harm. Meanwhile Porter's camp was severely shelled by the guns on the north slope of Crocodilespruit, some 2000 yards to his right, till he was forced to shift behind a kopje about a

quarter of a mile distant. With four of his own guns, however, he soon contrived to silence the fire.

When darkness fell the situation was still unchanged. The troops remained in their positions, with the exception of Alderson's corps which was relieved by Pilcher's. Nothing could exceed the gallantry shown by all ranks under the heavy fire, or the cheerfulness with which they received their scanty supplies and awaited a turn of luck. Fortunately the casualties had again been few.

Not a gun gave sign of what was going on to the east. Had Ian Hamilton been again unable to make headway the Boers would by the morning appear in yet greater numbers on Dickson's and Porter's flanks. It was another anxious night, though the reality, if known, would have dispersed all anxiety, for Lord Roberts had decided upon a further operation which had been completed that morning. He believed that by drawing Pole-Carew's division towards Ian Hamilton, the increased pressure would be enough to overpower the left flank of the enemy and push them back from the Donkerpoort and Diamond Hill positions; and his calculations proved correct.

Ian Hamilton again advanced at daylight. Broadwood's and Gordon's brigades were placed to cover his right and right rear, and succeeded in holding back about 1500 Boers that were threatening them. About mid-day part of the 11th division came up on his left; an hour later, he had taken the Rhenosterfontein position, and by evening the Boers were driven from all their defences.

Contrary to expectation, General French had found Snyman and Delarey as unyielding on his front in the afternoon as they had been all the morning; and though he was keenly watchful for any sign of

weakening in their lines, which might enable him to complete his flanking movement, no opportunity offered that day. It was not till the following morning that Lord Roberts's operations at Diamond Hill, and Ian Hamilton's success on the right, produced the due effect on French's front.

Reconnaissances at daybreak on June 13th disclosed the retirement east of the main force that had been opposing the cavalry for the last two days. There was now no longer need for the Vickers-Maxim that had been hoisted up over-night with great labour to the top of the western extremity of Louwbaken, nor for a section of O. battery that had climbed part of the way to a good position. Neither gun nor battery came into action. At half-past eight in the morning Porter dislodged a strong detachment at Crocodile-spruit Hill, and, his front cleared, was able at once to follow up their retreat eastwards up the Crocodile-spruit to Tweefontein. A corps of mounted infantry was also pushed forward, and, passing through Crocodilespruit Pass, moved on the Elands River about five miles north-east of Tweefontein, Dickson's brigade following later. The rough hilly country, strewn with big boulders and stiff obstructing bush, rendering it necessary to move with great caution in reconnoitring the ground, made the advance difficult and very slow.

The force which had been opposing the cavalry at the Kameelfontein ridge consisted of 3,000 men from the Mafeking and the Western commandos with Johannesburg Police, foreigners, the Irish Brigade, and the remnants of the Potchefstroom commandos. They had with them nine field-guns and several Vickers-Maxims.

By six in the evening General French's advance

line extended from Doornkraal to Kaffirkraal, with his headquarters at Tweefontein. He now ordered the battalion of infantry (the Lincolns and a field-battery) at Derdepoort, which had that morning been placed at his disposal, to join the rest of his force, and supported by a detachment of Hutton's mounted infantry to hold the Kameelfontein ridge commanding the drift.

General French had not succeeded in his allotted task of turning the Boer flank within the time prescribed by Lord Roberts; but in most difficult and precarious circumstances he had held the enemy to their positions, and by his tenacity of purpose prevented them from harassing the flank and rear of Lord Roberts's centre. This was a most valuable supplement to the operations at Diamond Hill. The resolution displayed by him on this trying occasion was only matched by the steadiness of the cavalry and Hutton's mounted troops under a demoralising fire of two days' duration.

The General now returned to Pretoria, as the waste in horses on the march from Bloemfontein and Kroonstad had been very considerable, and many cavalry details had to be considered.

Having returned to his camp at Derdepoort on June 14th, Hutton was again sent forward on June 16th to secure the Pretoria-Rustenburg road for General Baden-Powell, who had reached the latter place with 800 men on the 14th, and was now converging on Pretoria. With a force of 1062 of all ranks, including the 18th field-battery, Hutton, marching 30 miles west of Pretoria, reached and bivouacked at Rietfontein, after occupying Zilikats and Commando Nek Passes over the Magaliesberg. The next day, June 17th, half way to Rustenburg,

Baden-Powell's force came in sight, and after a cheery welcome and a short halt, resumed its march to Pretoria. Hutton, with 300 of his command, continued his advance 12 miles north to Zoutpansdrift by the Crocodile River, on the report that Plessis's commando and two guns were halted there; but Plessis had anticipated him by a six miles' start, and, not wishing to commit his small force and leg-weary horses to the unknown of the bush veldt, he decided that next morning a small detachment should set out in search of Plessis and his movements.

A gallant little party it was, consisting of a few scouts and 12 men from the 1st battalion of the Canadian Mounted Rifles under the command of Lieutenant Young. Avoiding any chance of opposition from the inhabitants on the western side, they crossed over, kept down the eastern bank of the Crocodile River, and coming within sight of a cluster of homesteads, skilfully deployed to take them in reverse, surrounding and disarming the inmates of the two farms. Pushing down to the drift and re-crossing, several farms were visited in turn, all containing parties attached to Plessis. With but few exceptions the inmates of the farms, to the number of 40, were disarmed, and the danger of our handful of men being surrounded thus removed. But that was not all; the sergeant had heard of the whereabouts of the two guns, and picking up the track of the wheels, followed them into the bush, and there sure enough stood the two guns concealed. It was dark and no time was to be lost. Capturing some oxen they were yoked as teams for the guns, and soon the whole party was under way, some bullets pursuing the line of skirmishers which had been put out as a rearguard. It was two in the morning before the sound of wheels told of

Lieutenant Young's safe and successful return. The next day, Wednesday, June 20th, General Hutton and his small force were back in their bivouac at Derdepoort.

In the meantime Broadwood's and Gordon's brigades had again been ordered out to join Ian Hamilton's column, although still further reduced in numbers. The marching out strength of Broadwood's brigade (Household Cavalry, 10th Hussars, and 12th Lancers) was only 48 officers, 528 men, and 504 horses, and of Gordon's (9th, 16th, and 17th Lancers) 55 officers, 906 men, and 487 horses, with Q. and R. batteries of horse-artillery attached respectively. Since Diamond Hill, Porter's and Dickson's brigades had remained camped at Kameeldrift. For three weeks their work was practically restricted to reconnaissance and patrol duty, demanding an alert and constant vigilance. After the withdrawal of the cavalry almost daily reports came in of the movements of the enemy and of threatened attacks from the direction of Bockenhout's Kloof on the Pietersburg and Delagoa Bay line.

On June 28th, Captain Bettelheim, in command of French's Scouts, with 26 men reconnoitred northwards from Derdepoort with a front between Pienaars River and the Pietersburg railway. Nearing Kroomdraai on the railway, 20 miles west of Pretoria, he came under a warm fire, and was obliged to retire with a loss of several horses killed. He reported the enemy in laagers further north of the line at Hamanskraal and Pienaars station. The presence and movements of Generals Erasmus, Grobelaar, Delarey, and Louis Botha continued to be reported between the Pietersburg and Delagoa Bay lines; and reconnoitring in that direction, Lieutenant Rundle of the Carabiniers and his patrol of eight men were taken prisoners.

From June 28th to July 5th patrols reported all clear within seven miles of the cavalry camp at Kameelfontein. But daily throughout the week, in consequence of alarms from the Pienaars Poort Intelligence Station, the two brigades stood to arms from the earliest dawn.

GENERAL FRENCH'S DIAMOND HILL OPERATIONS.

1. SCENE OF ACTION.

2. POM POM IN ACTION.

3. BRINGING UP POM POM AMMUNITION FROM THE REAR.

CHAPTER XII

OPERATIONS SOUTH-EAST OF PRETORIA

THE mounted patrols sent out to reconnoitre beyond the defensive posts held by our infantry returned without having sighted an enemy; and yet hardly were their backs turned when the enemy's presence in their neighbourhood became felt. Gradually it came out that Delarey and Grobelaar were holding the country in force north and north-east of Pretoria outside our picket-lines in positions threatening our defences. Driven back from the positions at Diamond Hill, Louis Botha's forces still continued to laager in considerable force in the neighbourhood of Bockenhout Kloof north-east of Pretoria, and to hang about the country between Pretoria and Springs ready to pounce on the troops guarding the line and to destroy the communications with Johannesburg and the south. The fertile country in the Bapstfontein hills to the east of the line was a secure haunt of Boer commandos. Dirksen, with the Boksburg commando, taking advantage of this excellent cover, and safe from pursuit, planned and executed several successful raids on outlying mines and lines of communication. The colleries at Springs had been the last scene of Dirksen's activity, and the annoyance he caused making it necessary to clear up this section of the country without delay, the work was assigned to Hutton.

On June 22nd, two days after clearing the way for Baden-Powell into Pretoria, Hutton was directed to proceed to Rietfontein with 800 mounted infantry. But all the horses fit to stand up only enabled 400 men to take the field under Pilcher, who was in command with four horse-artillery guns. From Rietfontein a detachment of 120 men moved on 10 miles towards Bapstfontein, to gain touch with the enemy's patrols and reconnoitre the locality. Contact was established with the Boer outposts, but the enemy being strongly reinforced our men were obliged to beat a retreat, with the loss of one officer and a few men wounded.

Renewed designs on the Johannesburg railway, however, made instant action necessary. On July 2nd Hutton received orders from Lord Roberts to move his whole brigade from Derdepoort to Rietfontein, whence he was to harass the enemy reported to be entrenched along the Standerton road east of Springs, and to clear the country along the rocky ridge running in a south-easterly direction from Tygerpoort to Witpoort on the Bronkhurstspruit below Olifantsfontein. General Mahon was on his way to Rietfontein with the Imperial Light Horse (450 men), a battery, and two battalions of infantry; Pilcher had been moved north-east to Tygerpoort, and on July 4th Alderson brought his mounted infantry to Rietfontein. Hutton, who was in command of the whole force, joined the same afternoon, and immediately commenced reconnoitring the country to the north-east. The enemy was reported to be entrenched in force 20 miles south-east of Rietfontein, threatening the railway, and Hutton's orders were to attack and drive them off. For this purpose more troops were sent him, till he was able to take the field with

5,520 men, including 1,520 mounted troops and 26 guns.

With a view to thoroughly reconnoitring the enemy's positions, Hutton directed Mahon, with 1,000 mounted troops and a battery, to march on the night of July 5th to the high ground at Tweefontein, about 12 miles south-east of the main bivouac at Rietfontein, which commands the surrounding country, if possible to seize the Boer pickets, and reconnoitre from there the following morning. At half-past eight in the evening Mahon set out, and reached his destination soon after midnight. A biting wind was blowing across the high veldt, and after a cold and sleepless night, morning broke with an attack of 300 Boers, which, however, was easily repulsed.

So soon as it was light Hutton followed with the remainder of his force, leaving half a battalion of infantry to maintain communication with Pilcher at Tygerpoort and with Irene station on the railway, which was his base of supply. By eleven Hutton reached Mahon, who was holding the high ground but had not succeeded in capturing the patrols. From their position they could see Pilcher clearing the ridge between Tygerpoort and Witpoort, and Mahon was now directed to move his mounted force towards Pilcher, to support him in clearing the country west of the ridge, and afterwards to return to Rietfontein, where, at the head of a spruit in a cluster of small farms, Hutton had established his main bivouac with his headquarters in one of the houses.

Before moving further along the Standerton road Hutton determined on a reconnaissance in force, supported by infantry, to clear up the situation in the direction of Bronkhurstspruit, eight miles north-east of the bivouac, to ascertain definitely whether the

Boers were in any strength on the ridge of hills extending from Tygerpoort past Witpoort to Hekpoort, running nearly parallel to the Standerton road. Both the Bronkhurstspruit and its tributary the Buffelspruit break through these hills and run in a northerly direction. The Boers, as will be seen, occupied the hills between the two streams, and not only did they hold their own against our attempt to oust them, but, working down the Bronkhurstspruit westward, began to extend their lines in a southerly direction so as to threaten our flanks. The plan provided for a semi-circular move towards the enemy's supposed position. All the mounted troops (except the 20th company of Imperial Yeomanry) under Mahon, were first to head north towards Buffelspruit, then to branch off south-east, striking the Bronkhurstspruit at Witklipbank, and complete the circuit by following its course south-west back to Witklip. Pilcher was to work in with Mahon by again advancing from Tygerpoort towards Witpoort, and Smith-Dorrien, in command of the lines of communication between Pretoria and Johannesburg, had undertaken to co-operate by sending all his available mounted troops from Springs towards Witpoort.

General Mahon left bivouac at daylight, and, to cover his movements, the infantry and heavy guns with two batteries of artillery advanced to some high ground three miles east of the main bivouac.

The Boers concentrated their whole attention on Mahon. Shortly before noon considerable parties of them were seen nine miles off, passing through the gap of the ridge at Koffyspruit Poort and making for Mahon's left, while a smaller detachment succeeded in slipping in between his right and the infantry. An hour later another body advanced against him from

the north-east, and a hot engagement followed, in which the Imperial Light Horse were attacked at close range, and in a few seconds lost two officers and six men killed and 11 wounded.

Mahon, finding the Boers outstripping and threatening his right flank, asked for reinforcements; but as the day was wearing on and the infantry were still six miles distant, General Hutton, aware that his left flank was exposed, and the strength of the enemy beyond the Witpoort being unknown, decided not to withdraw the infantry in support of Mahon, and sent instead a battery of horse-artillery to his assistance. But the pressure had become so strong that Mahon deemed it wise to fall back with his right, which left Alderson exposed on his left for a time, until he too was able to retire. The whole force then withdrew on the infantry and artillery, and returned to the Rietfontein bivouac late in the evening.

The casualties for the day were two officers and six men killed, one officer and 25 men wounded.

Although the mounted troops had succeeded in checking the enveloping tactics of the enemy, the determined manner in which he tried to gain ground disclosed his intention and expectations. On the next day his force was largely increased, being estimated at 6,000, with Louis Botha, Dirksen, and Buys in command. Pursuing their enveloping tactics, the Boers extended south of our lines and threatened our force on three sides, the road back to Pretoria being alone kept open. Hutton guarded against a surprise by a careful disposition of his outposts, and had his troops in position soon after daylight.

It was early apparent that the enemy, emboldened by the previous day's proceedings, intended an attack upon us with his whole force, and his plan of operation

soon disclosed itself. Expecting Hutton to continue his move eastward, the Boers had established their front across the high ground by Leeuwpoort east of Olifantsfontein, and, engaging his centre, they hoped to envelope his flanks and close in upon him with his long train of transport back on the Pretoria road. Instead therefore of assuming offensive operations, Hutton found himself obliged to act on the defensive.

At about eight o'clock bodies of Boers were seen moving rapidly round his positions to the north and south about six miles distant, while in his front, six miles to the east, they were showing in considerable force and had their artillery in position. Their alignment round Hutton's position covered a circumference of 23 miles. Mahon, with the Imperial Light Horse, Alderson's corps, and one battery of horse-artillery, formed our left, and were well out north towards Witpoort checking the Boer right; but his own right was weak, and the Boer commanders, well aware of this, were developing a flanking movement against it at some distance. The movement, however, was arrested by Hutton, who with timely precaution pushed out the New Zealand Mounted Rifles, the 20th company of Imperial Yeomanry, and G. battery south-west towards Springs. Hutton's inner line was very strong in infantry and artillery, as he had withdrawn his line of defence a good deal to assist the concentration of his force. The 5-in. guns and the artillery were very active, and effectively prevented further offensive movements from Louis Botha, who was in command that day with Dirksen on his left and Pienaar and Buys on his right.

Hutton's dispositions the next morning did not vary much from those of the previous day, which enabled him to prevent the enemy from seizing a ridge

above his camp held by a picket. Later on he despatched Alderson, with his corps and two Vickers-Maxims, south-west, with a view to open the line of communication towards Springs, and instructed Mahon, covered by two 5-in. guns and supported by Pilcher from Tygerpoort, to make an attempt to gain possession of Witpoort ridge, a design, however, which Mahon found himself unable to carry out.

The dangerous position in which Hutton found himself, with his right threatened and exposed, had meanwhile induced Lord Roberts to send General French that day with Porter's brigade to his support. French's orders were to take over command of the whole force, press the enemy back beyond Bronkhurstspruit, and prepare the ground for an early advance of the army east by Middleburg to Lydenburg.

On Monday, July 9th, Porter's brigade (about 1,000 strong) marched from their bivouac at Kameelfontein 27 miles south to Grootfontein. General French with his Staff, after a sharp ride, reached the homestead of Grootfontein, on the Pretoria-Standerton road, late in the afternoon, and established his headquarters there for the night. At seven in the evening Porter's brigade marched into camp and bivouacked two miles to the east; and early the next morning he was again to join Hutton's forces 15 miles off at Rietvlei. By noon on the 10th French had met Hutton and taken over the command. Porter reached Rietvlei in the afternoon, and bivouacked opposite Hutton's main camp on the right of the spruit, and within a mile of French's headquarters, which were established at Katboschfontein adjoining Rietvlei. The communications with Springs had been assured by Hutton. On his front the enemy was diminishing, and they seemed to be withdrawing

across the Bronkhurstspruit, retaining in strength only their Witpoort position which formed the centre of the ridges striking south-east from Pretoria. French saw at once the necessity of dislodging them from these ridges; but, desirous of keeping them massed close within reach and inside the scope of the next general scheme of operations to the east, he made dispositions which would push them back without bringing on a serious action and causing them to scatter wide afield. With this object he determined to threaten their right from the direction of Tygerpoort on tbe west and Rietfontein on the south-west, while the cavalry operated on their left near Leeuwpoort. Hutton, leaving one battalion and two 5-in. guns on the hill north-east of Rietvlei as a pivot of manœuvre, was to move on the morning of July 11th against the enemy's right flank and right rear, and occupy Witpoort. Porter, starting a little earlier for Leeuwpoort, was to operate on the enemy's left and seize the hill north of Geluk adjoining Leeuwpoort, which commands the country for miles round, but to advance no further east without instructions.

General French's plans were well conceived. The enemy, threatened on their front and flanks, refused to stand, and, yielding the ground, gave us the command of their positions and control of their immediate movements.

As Porter approached the hill he found it occupied by about 500 Boers with two guns. Making a wide turning movement over the high and open ground to the east, his guns shelled the ridge, while the 8th Hussars were pushed forward and succeeded in dislodging the enemy from Leeuwpoort Hill, which was at once occupied by Porter. The Boers, retiring across the Bronkhurstspruit, opened fire with their

two guns from the high ground at Zonderfontein, but did no damage.

Meanwhile Hutton had been equally successful. His dispositions arranged for the advance of the 1st Mounted Infantry, 1st Canadian Mounted Rifles, the New Zealand Mounted Rifles, the 20th company of Imperial Yeomanry, and G. battery towards the ridge between Tygerpoort and Witpoort, to assemble at a point six miles north of Witpoort with Pilcher from Tygerpoort with 350 men and two Vickers-Maxims. Turning to the south-east the combined force was to take the enemy in flank and rear and clear the ridge and the country immediately to the north. Mahon, with the Imperial Light Horse, a battery of horse-artillery, and one battalion of the Royal Irish Fusiliers, was to advance on Alderson's right and connect with the two infantry battalions, the 66th battery of field-artillery, and the two 5-inch guns which Hutton intended to lead in a direct attack on the Witpoort gorge the moment Alderson's movement had sufficiently developed.

Alderson concentrated his forces, including 300 mounted infantry under Henry detached for the day from the 11th division, and started soon after eight in the morning. As arranged, Mahon moved forward and by degrees the attack developed.

Under the heavy bombardment of the 5-inch guns Hutton advanced his centre from the south, and soon after noon had gained a footing on the Witpoort ridge, and was clearing the Durstfontein ridge adjoining on the south-east. Alderson's troops, however, in the flat country north of the ridge, being a little late in completing their movement, the enemy was insufficiently pressed; they had retreated in an easterly direction beyond Durstfontein and seemed inclined

to make a stand. To meet the situation, therefore, Hutton swung round his infantry, and Alderson engaged on a further turning movement. This new arrangement was just working up to the final effect, when at about two o'clock unwelcome orders arrived, which broke into the completion of the operations.

Round Pretoria the situation had become more serious. The enemy was concentrating in force to the north, and was closing up against us all along the line of the Magaliesberg Range. Grobelaar on the north and Delarey to his left seemed bent on mischief, and had that day overpowered the Lincoln Post at Zilikats Nek, and attacked the 7th Dragoon Guards near Watervaal. Mahon and Pilcher, with their respective commands and a battery of horse-artillery, were accordingly ordered to return at once to Pretoria.

Though it was disappointing to lose such important support at this juncture the full force of the combined attack had already produced its effect, and by three in the afternoon the Boers' last resistance was broken and we had possession of the ridges north-east of Witpoort as far as Koffyspruit, which was held by one battalion of infantry and a field-battery. The New Zealanders, who had been at Bapstfontein, came up to hold the Witpoort ridge, and all the other troops had orders to bivouac on the positions gained. At the same time Porter's cavalry went into bivouac by the stream at Olifantsfontein below Leeuwfontein Hill, which was held by outposts; and General French remained for the night at Katboschfontein adjoining Rietvlei.

The day had been completely successful, the Boers having been driven beyond the Bronkhurstspruit, and the positions won commanding the river at all points south-east of Witpoort. The respective commands had worked well, and Porter's dashing attack on

Leeuwpoort Hill greatly assisted the operations. The movements of the enemy had been various and puzzling, but with a right instinct General French had guessed their purport. He saw that the Boers' plan was to prevent us from striking at their main line of supply, the Delagoa Bay line that had been so inestimably useful to them throughout the campaign. A firm footing on the line to the east, thus cutting off the enemy's communications, would put a stop to the annoyance at Pretoria and probably end the war. French was in favour of a move on the enemy's rear on their communications back by Middelburg, and was anxious to undertake the task at once, indeed on that very day, with whatever troops were available, even without reinforcements.

It seems, however, that Lord Roberts considered it his first concern to clear his left flank, and to that end was obliged to keep back the cavalry for the present, though they were later on to undertake the movement in co-operation with the 11th division. French, knowing that the cavalry could be relied on to render valuable assistance in independent strategic action, never ceased to take this view until at last the main advance along the line had become an accomplished fact.

The four battalions of infantry under Colonel Brooke and two 5-inch guns were recalled, leaving Hutton with the battalion of Royal Irish Fusiliers (650 strong) of which three companies under Major Munn and two Vickers-Maxims held the Witpoort posts, while Porter's brigade (1,100 men and six guns) assured the positions at Rietvlei.

Early on the morning of Thursday, July 12th, the Royal Fusiliers, the Border Regiment, and the Connaught Rangers marched for Pretoria. General

French, having also received a summons to the capital, left a couple of hours later, after an interview with Hutton, and pushing the pace reached Pretoria soon after noon, to learn on his arrival that the situation for the time being had settled down. Immediate action being no longer necessary, General French for the next two days devoted his attention to perfecting his arrangements for the promised move eastward. Lord Roberts was indeed scheming further operations.

As for the disaster at Zilikats Nek, accounts go to show that Baden-Powell, who, with about 1500 men and two batteries, held Commando Nek (Hartebeest Poort) on the Magaliesberg range, was sent on the evening of July 6th to Rustenburg to the support of Major Hanbury-Tracy, whose small garrison was threatened by some 400 Boers. The Scots Greys and four guns, who were holding the nek through which the railway passes three miles north of Wonderhoom fort and five south of Watervaal station, were to take over Baden-Powell's position at Hartebeest Poort; and on the morning of the 7th, the 7th Dragoon Guards and O. battery went out to relieve the Scots Greys at the nek. Immediately on their arrival, Colonel Alexander marched off with three squadrons of the Greys, each about 100 strong, some 50 Australian Horse, and two sections of O. battery under Major Sir John Jervis, leaving two guns behind with the 7th Dragoon Guards.

General Powell, having laid stress on Zilikats Nek being held as well as Commando Nek which is six miles to the west, and the advisability of placing a reserve detachment on a hill below the two, about two miles east of the bridge over the Crocodile, Colonel Alexander was directed to hold both positions. He

marched his small force therefore along the north side of the Magaliesberg range to Zilikats Nek where he crossed over to the south side.

Scobell, with his squadron (about 80 strong), and two guns under Lieutenant Davis, were left at Zilikats Nek; Maud, with one squadron and a Maxim gun, was sent to Commando Nek, and Colonel Alexander himself with the remaining squadron of Greys, the Australian Horse, and a section of horse-artillery, took up a position in the valley running west from Pretoria and equi-distant from the two neks. Scobell remained at Zilikats Nek from the 8th to the 10th without any further support, though rumours, at first discredited but subsequently gaining substance, indicated that Delarey with 1,600 men was on the north side of the nek within a few miles, and that Scobell might expect to be attacked at any moment. These rumours were passed on to the colonel in command, who in turn transmitted them to Pretoria.

Colonel Roberts, with the 2nd Lincolnshires, sent on July 10th as a relieving contingent, arrived in the afternoon with five weak companies designing to take over Zilikats and Commando Neks from the Scots Greys. His intention was to remain himself with three companies at Zilikats Nek and to send the other two with a Maxim gun to Commando Nek; but his men were so tired that he decided to keep the two companies for Commando Nek down at the foot of the pass (1200 yards away on the south) for the night, while he himself came up and took over Scobell's position with the other three companies, comprising less than 180 men in all. Having handed over the position to Colonel Roberts and shown him where the outposts had been placed on the previous nights, Scobell with-

drew his men; but, believing an attack imminent, he did not join the supporting squadron in the valley, and only sent his horses down into the bushes at the foot of the slope leading up to the nek, his men sleeping in column of troops with their rifles alongside of them ready for instant action.

There was a high overhanging kopje on the east side commanding the camp from about 1,000 yards range, and on the left a small rocky kopje through which the nek runs and the road is cut for some 40 or 50 feet. Further to the west, some 2,000 yards away, was another high kopje, the north side of which sloped gradually and was covered with bushes 12 or 15 feet high and very thick. On the south the ground was very stony, and fell gradually with no real cover for 1,000 yards or so to the valley below with a belt of mimosa trees some half a mile broad. It was not light at that season until six o'clock, and in the comfortless hour before morning has dissipated the damps of night shots rang out from the picket on the right, or eastern flank, placed about half way up the slope leading to the steep high kopje. It was seven or eight minutes before the Boers replied, and they began by firing volleys from the high kopje on the east. All Scobell's men sprang to their feet, ready to move out before the first two shots had died away. An ominous silence followed our alarm, and Scobell had time to climb half-way up the little centre kopje through which the nek was cut before volley after volley was poured out from the high hill (A.) on the east. At first the bullets passed harmlessly overhead, and the Greys and Lincolns, who had doubled to the centre kojpe, were able unharmed to take what cover they could among the rocks there; but the men with the limbers, ammunition wagon, and horses of the artillery (at L.) who

had farther to go to reach the shelter of the nek, were less fortunate. They had scarcely covered 100 out of the 300 yards when the enemy had picked up the range, killed and wounded seven men, and knocked over every horse and mule in the teams.

Meanwhile a tremendous fire began to be poured on the centre kopje (B.) from the hill on the right (A.) and soon from that on the left (C.) as well. Two guns of O. battery fired two, or perhaps three, shells, and were then silenced, every man in the section being disabled. The picket on the right flank, which had given warning of the attack, was silenced too, for, killed or captured, not one was left, while from the officer commanding the picket on the left came an urgent appeal for reinforcements. Colonel Roberts sent up 25 of Scobell's men, and Lieutenant Pilkington of the Royals (temporarily attached to the Greys) took them out, and in so doing met his death.

And all this while the Boers were creeping in closer, inch by inch, with the greatest deliberation and coolness, taking advantage of every scrap of cover. It seemed that ground was gained by three or four first-rate shots advancing boldly and establishing themselves where cover was good, and then under their hot and very accurate fire other men would creep up.

About mid-day some of our men raised a cheer, believing they saw reinforcements coming; but they were only the two companies of Lincolns, who had bivouacked down by the store at the foot of the slope, making their way across the valley to another position.

In the rush for shelter, when the Boers first opened fire, the heliograph had been left some 150 yards down the slope, and it was almost certain death for any man to go for it. A gallant Grey volunteered, ran out

through a storm of bullets, and reached the instrument safely; but hardly had he made 10 yards of his way back, when he rolled over and lay still. A Lincolnshire man tried next, brought it back a few more yards, and then dropped badly wounded. Another Grey followed, and had carried his prize to within 12 yards of safety, when he too fell, hit in three places. Eventually the heliograph was rescued, but no reply could be received from the valley.

A thin line of horsemen was now seen advancing from the south, and soon they brought the section of guns left with the support into action, raining their shells on the eastern hill (A.), and the galling fire from that point on the centre kopje slackened perceptibly. There was scarcely time to believe that help was at hand when our guns ceased, and nothing more was heard from the valley.

About two o'clock one of Scobell's men brought him word of Boers on the east end of the little centre kopje he was holding. Scobell with his lieutenant Conolly went forward to look, and there they could see seven or eight Boers coolly establishing themselves only 40 yards away. A shot into them disabled two and dispersed the rest, and at that moment Scobell was called down to the nek by Colonel Roberts. A quarter of an hour later Conolly was gone too,—shot through the head at a few yards range as he was taking five or six men, as gallant as himself, across the centre of the kopje.

The enemy kept drawing on; every hour saw them hemming us closer in, and by three o'clock it was evident that our men on the left had been overpowered. About four the little party was subjected to a severe shell fire, and if reinforcements did not soon arrive from Pretoria it was evident that they must surrender,

as their fire had grown very feeble now and there was but little ammunition left. A little earlier Scobell's second-in-command, Captain Maxwell, had been shot through the body, which added the last of his officers to the list of casualties.

At about half-past five in the evening a considerable number had fallen, killed or wounded, and as yet no reliefs had arrived. The Boers were within 200 yards on the west, nearer still on the east, and were shelling at close range from the north. Clearly the position could not be held for more than a few minutes longer. It was either a case of running with their lives in their hands, or of surrender.

The sun was now set, but there was a full moon and a bright cloudless sky. The ground was strewn with dead and wounded bodies ; a further stand meant the life of every man, and Colonel Roberts considered it his duty to save further loss of life and surrender. The white flag was hoisted, and Delarey came down to take over the prisoners. Out of less than 250 men engaged there were 24 killed and 56 wounded. The two guns of O. battery, 90 officers and men of the Lincolns with their colonel, who had been wounded early in the day, and three unwounded officers of the Greys were all captured, including Scobell, who, opposed to a surrender that seemed inevitable, managed to effect his escape later amid a storm of bullets. Hiding for upwards of an hour in the bushes, he made his way across the valley and reached Pretoria the next morning, July 12th. The wounded were allowed to proceed to Pretoria, but the rest were sent to Noitgedacht, where they spent a miserable six weeks before they were released by General French on September 3rd.

The 1st Kings Own Scottish Borderers were sent

on the same day from Pretoria to reinforce the post, but arrived too late to be of any assistance.

Preparatory to a general advance eastward, Lord Roberts deemed it advisable to make a reconnaissance in force north and north-east to ascertain the enemy's strength in those directions and clear him out if necessary. General French was in command of the cavalry, and directed to co-operate with Ian Hamilton who was to move with Mahon along the northern side of the Delagoa Bay line.

On Monday, July 16th, Mahon and Dickson, with their respective commands, were assembled at Derdepoort. At eight o'clock the 14th Hussars were detailed to reconnoitre the kopjes north of Doornpoort; and at the same time the Imperial Light Horse with a battery of horse-artillery moved north down the left bank of the Derdepoort Spruit and occupied a kopje, known as Observation Hill, unopposed. On the right of the spruit the remainder of Mahon's force kept up connection with the left of Pole-Carew's infantry division established along the Delagoa Bay line.

The morning was very hazy, and for some time General French found it impossible to locate Ian Hamilton; but communication was soon established, and his column was made out moving from the west towards the left of the Pietersburg line.

As the cavalry advanced about 100 Boers were seen leaving the Doornpoort hills in a north-easterly direction, and four miles to the south-west of Roodeplaats, close by the scene of the Diamond Hill operations, a ridge was found to be occupied by some 400 Boers with two guns and a pom-pom. They opened a hot but ineffective shell fire on the drift at Kameeldrift farm, probably in the belief that the

cavalry were making their way across. French made no reply, preferring to hold the enemy in their positions till Ian Hamilton's column had worked round their right flank, feeling confident that, with two battalions of infantry and two guns close up, he could clear the ground at any time.

About noon it became known that Ian Hamilton had occupied the continuation of the Doornpoort hills extending to the left of the railway to the north of Pyramid Kopjes, and that Lord Roberts, satisfied with the result of the reconnaissance, was returning to Pretoria.

Finding the positions occupied by the enemy but lightly held and of little consequence, French ordered the return of the 4th brigade to Derdepoort. Mahon took over his positions, which, linking together the forces of the two generals, connected Ian Hamilton's right with Pole-Carew's left. Then French, impatient to be away eastward, directed Dickson to take his brigade the next day to Rietvlei, and himself arriving the day after, joined Hutton's force which had remained behind to hold these positions.

Two days previous (on July 16th) at the same moment that French and Ian Hamilton were engaged north-east of Pretoria, Hutton was being attacked by a Boer force under Ben Viljoen. The Boers hoped to drive him off the Witpoort and Durstfontein ridge, to cut in between the Johannesburg-Pretoria communications, and by these means lay those two towns open to their attack. Hutton had warning of the enemy's intentions, as his outposts on the Hekpoort-Durstfontein ridge had been threatened by the enemy before dark, and he took the precaution to at once reinforce them by two squadrons of cavalry and two guns. The line extended 17 miles from

flank to flank, his left on Witpoort Ridge being held by three companies of the Royal Irish Fusiliers, 60 New Zealand Mounted Rifles under Captain Vaughan, and two Vickers-Maxims, his right on Leeuwpoort Hill by Colonel Clowes and the 1st cavalry brigade with one company of Irish Fusiliers and one 5-in. gun.

The enemy began their attack about seven in the morning against the Koffyspruit and Durstfontein outposts held by the 1st mounted infantry under Alderson, who, after a vigorous defence, skilfully withdrew his force nearer in towards Hutton's centre at Rietfontein and practically halfway between the two extreme points of the latter's line of defence. At the same time the Witpoort post under Major Munn was heavily shelled for about two hours, and was then vigorously attacked by Viljoen and his commando of 600 along the ridge from the south-east, but without avail.

Soon after dawn part of Viljoen's force also delivered a frontal attack on the position on Leeuwpoort Hill from the direction of Hekpoort. One of the pickets was driven in, but the others held their ground, and finding their assaults unavailing, the enemy worked round and soon after midday made a flank attack from two sides against Clowes's right which was severely shelled by two guns and a Vickers-Maxim; but they were beaten off there also. In the meantime Major Munn's position was once more attacked from the north-west and from the plain on the north by Pienaar's commando numbering 500. The Boers showed great determination, and some even ventured within arms' length of the Fusiliers, calling upon them to surrender; but Munn's little force was not to be brow-beaten,

and made a most gallant stand in spite of several rushes by the enemy.

The moment Hutton felt assured that Clowes could hold his own, he sent his reserve of mounted troops (whom he had kept in hand in the centre ready to act as the development of the attack required) with Alderson to the support of Munn; and although arriving too late to save a small detachment of New Zealanders from suffering severely, he took up the offensive, and not only checked further encroachment but drove the enemy from the ridge. By sunset the Boers had abandoned all their positions and were in full retreat north-east. Our object was gained, but at the cost of a heavy casualty roll, 58 in all.

CHAPTER XIII

MIDDELBURG

It may be well, at this juncture, to review the situation, and to note in what manner the subsequent operations were influenced by circumstances.

The flying march north, the surrender of towns and abandonment of positions, and, at last, the occupation of Pretoria, the stronghold and seat of Government, whatever the momentary feeling of exultation on the one side and despair on the other, brought no end to the war. The overwhelming suddenness of our advance may have affected the leaders with a sense of powerlessness, filled their followers with dismay, and broken up the commandos ; but they soon began to realise that, Pretoria once reached, our main purpose was accomplished. It was now their turn : the British had played their part ; the Boers were about to begin theirs.

With the surrender of the towns we expected the unconditional surrender of the fighting force of the country, but it was not to be ; the Boers recovered strength, and Christian De Wet sprang into action, alert, resourceful, an organizer and leader of men. The tone and temper of the people changed, and angry resistance rose up everywhere. After all, the Boers were still at large, moving easily about the

Free State and the Transvaal. The English advance, like a ploughshare with a narrow track, had cut through the country, throwing the Boers aside, but ready to form up again and reassemble at will.

Lord Roberts, finding that the Boers, unlike Europeans, cared little for their towns and railways, and were far from believing themselves worsted, was obliged to break off peace negotiations and resume hostilities. He proceeded to carry out an elaborate strategical scheme, which spread over the face of the country. Our troops, on a wide front, swept through the western Transvaal and the northern Free State, visiting farms and occupying the chief towns. There was to be a great move eastward, by Middelburg to Belfast, Lydenburg, and Barberton. Large numbers of Boers defied us from these eastern hills; we were to break into their power and authority, dispossess them of their fastnesses, and hold them in British occupation. The Commander-in-Chief in person was to conduct the operations of a combined movement of the troops under Generals Buller, Ian Hamilton, Pole-Carew, and French, Pole-Carew with the 11th division on the Delagoa Bay line of communications in the centre, Ian Hamilton on the north, with Mahon parallel to him, French, and with him Hutton, forming the right wing south. Keeping time with the rest, Buller would move his army eastward, sweeping up from Standerton by Ermelo.

Never was General French more eagerly alive to opportunities, more ready to recognise the capacity of the cavalry and turn their independent operations to account, than when the great easterly movement was in contemplation. Hitherto the operations of the cavalry on the flank of the main army had merely driven the Boers from their positions northward;

and the General felt that a repetition of these tactics would only force them into fastnesses from which it would be hard to dislodge them and eventually increase our difficulties.

General French's experiences all prompted him to a sudden decisive action. Independent movements in the nature of a surprise, wide enough to be well within the rear of the enemy and compel him to take the defensive, gave, in his opinion, enough promise of success to justify the boldness of the enterprise. With his self-reliant judgment and the nerve of the true cavalry leader, he was able to undertake operations where a less resolute character would have shrunk before the hazards. He never contemplated the possibility of a situation whence the cavalry, with the advantage of being able to fight on foot or on horseback, would be unable to extricate themselves in case of necessity. From this caution came a confidence which stood him in good stead in his bold moves against an enemy nervously anxious about their lines of retreat and communication. All in favour of surprising by a rapid advance, he believed that a quick forward movement, by a wide detour sweeping far beyond Balmoral, outflanking the Middelburg Boers, and placing him astride the railway between Middelburg and Belfast, would offer the best chances of success. But other counsels prevailed, and a different course was decided upon. The main body was weak in cavalry; such a movement would mean separation from them, and the infantry required to have their front cleared and their flank covered. Lord Roberts apparently feared to risk his cavalry in distant isolation. He must have doubted the certain success of the turning movement, and evidently did not share French's confident belief that so large a

body of mounted men could run no danger of capture or fail to extricate themselves from an inconvenient position. It was essential, moreover, to the success of his scheme that the cavalry should be close at hand near the railway, at his disposal to cut the enemy's communications between Bronkhurstspruit and Balmoral, and to capture his guns, a vital point in the operations. Finding it, therefore, impossible to alter or modify the careful arrangement of his plans, Lord Roberts directed French, already on a wide circle ahead, to abandon his project, draw closer in towards the railway, and keep in touch with Pole-Carew's right.

Disposing Hutton to connect with Pole-Carew, his left thrown slightly back, his right thrust forward on a wide front, to prevent the enemy from doubling back to the south-east, French, although restricted to a much narrower sweep, still hoped for an opportunity against their flank or rear.

He had planned his advance for Wednesday, July 18th, but owing to various causes he did not succeed in getting away till Monday, July 23rd. Six days later Middelburg, through which Botha had passed only the day before, fell into his hands, in the face of troublesome commandos, skirmishing parties, and invisible snipers, who had continually harassed his upward march, and was occupied by Hutton's troops.

General French left Pretoria early on July 19th and after a 35 miles' ride reached Katboschfontein in the afternoon. His advance had been postponed for 24 hours owing to unavoidable delays on the part of Ian Hamilton and Lord Methuen, and another day had been lost in waiting for supplies. By the 21st he hoped

to reach Steenkoolspruit, a tributary of the Olifants River. His dispositions were as follows :—

The advance was to be *en echelon*, Gordon's brigade on the right (moving on Dieplaagte on the Wilge River 28 miles south of the Delagoa Bay line), Dickson's in the centre (with Weltevreden for its objective), and Hutton on the left (heading for Waikraal on the Bronkhurstspruit, 13 miles south of the Delagoa Bay line. This movement, French estimated, would turn the enemy's positions at Bronkhurstspruit and Wilge River. Pushing on, Dickson would reach Steenkoolspruit on the evening of the 22nd, Gordon being then some miles south-east and Hutton north-west of him between the Wilge and Olifants Rivers.

But French was being held back, as in consequence of Ian Hamilton's further delays another postponement might be necessary. However, early on the 19th the cavalry was allowed to advance as far as Bronkhurstspruit, and wait there. To French a further delay, though vexing at the moment, would be preferable, if followed by swift and continuous movement, to an advance begun and then interrupted, which was the other alternative suggested. While undoubtedly appreciating the importance of a rapid advance Lord Roberts probably deprecated any premature movement which might place French out of reach of communication at a critical moment.

Orders had already been issued to march the next day, Saturday, July 21st, when a sudden movement on the part of De Wet in the Orange River Colony again hindered the advance. The Boer leader was reported to have broken Hunter's cordon near Bethlehem with 2000 men, and, with the evident intention of escorting Steyn, who was to join Kruger east of Middelburg, to have passed Heilbron in a

north-easterly direction. Broadwood, with the 2nd and 3rd brigades, and Ridley with the mounted infantry, were after him beyond Lindley, while Clery was on the way to Greylingstadt. Should Steyn succeed in getting north on the Natal line, French would be required to divert his course and attempt to head him off.

The 11th division was expected to move to Elands River station on Sunday, July 22nd, and Ian Hamilton was due to arrive there from the north; and since it was thought prudent to have the cavalry well in their front, discretion was given to an advance as far as Bronkhurstspruit. But French felt that a short advance might lessen the hold that his present extended positions gave him over a large number of the enemy gathered on his front, and might also prematurely disclose his designs; a halt at Bronkhurstspruit, moreover, would put him out of convenient reach of his supplies from Springs and beyond telegraphic communication. Ian Hamilton and Mahon, hindered by difficult country, could not get beyond Onverwacht, adjoining Doornkraal to the east, before Sunday the 22nd, and Pole-Carew was unable to move on Elands River station till that day. French, therefore, was allowed to remain where he was till Monday the 23rd, and in the interval sent his convoys to fill up at Springs.

On Saturday morning, July 21st, the outposts reported no sign of the enemy to the south-east, but at two in the afternoon a body of some 800 Boers were observed on the ridge west of Boschpoort close to the Wilge River. They were moving down to a ridge on Hekpoort, facing our outposts on Leeuwpoort Hill. The patrols also found a ridge south of Zonderfontein lightly held by the enemy.

During the day Pole-Carew, previous to his

advance on Elands River station, had made a demonstration from his right. The mounted infantry with guns went round Witfontein by Morskop, and found the enemy holding both places in strength with long-range guns; one gun they also had on the back of Boschkop south of Witfontein. French was to have concentrated his force at Waaikraal on the following morning to assist in the clearing operation, but on further consideration it was decided that the wide turning movement which the cavalry would perform along with the general advance of the army on Monday would be sufficient to produce the necessary effect.

On the morning of Sunday, July 22nd, General French held a conference with the brigadiers at his headquarters. The enemy, estimated at about 5,000 with eight guns, was reported near Bronkhurstspruit with about 1000 men and three guns on his front facing Leeuwkop Hill. The main army was to march in three columns eastward, Ian Hamilton north from Overwacht, Pole-Carew by Pienaar's Poort. The objective of the cavalry moving on the right was to destroy the railway at some point between Middelburg and Belfast, and cut off the enemy's retreat from a well-chosen position on the Middelburg-Lydenburg road.

At six on the morning of Monday, July 23rd, the general advance began, reconnoitring parties having been sent ahead half an hour earlier. There had been much rain for the last three days, and the men left camp cold and wet, and wrapped in a heavy fog; by nine, however, the fog cleared and from the hills above the scene of operations began to be visible, an uneven country with deep valleys intersected by water-courses leading into larger river-beds.

General French took up his position at Leeuwpoort Hill, in heliographic communication with the three columns and on the telegraph-wire with Headquarters.

Gordon with the 1st brigade moved south-east towards Dieplaagte. Save for some sniping he met with no opposition till well south of Hekpoort Hill, when a heavy fire was poured into him by a party of 200 Boers under the command of Dirksen, who, however, soon retired before him in a south-easterly direction towards Schoengezicht, left of the Wilge River.

Dickson with the 4th brigade (less the 8th Hussars) advanced north-east, well clear of the ridge between Witpoort and Hekpoort, and by ten o'clock had succeeded in occupying the high ground east of Zonderfontein. He took the position without much difficulty, opposed only by small detachments of the enemy, the 8th Hussars and a 5″ gun acting as a pivot in the operation on the rise east of Leeuwpoort.

Hutton's column, composed of Alderson's mounted infantry, about 750 Canadians, two battalions of infantry, some horse-artillery guns, a field-battery, and one 5″ gun advanced east from Witpoort to the north of the ridge between that place and Hekpoort chain, and striking the Koffyspruit near Klipspruit crossed without opposition.

By nine o'clock the turning movement must have attracted the observation of the enemy, for about 400 of them left the Hekpoort ridge and retired north-east to the Boschpoort ridge that slopes to the Wilge River. Another body of the same strength, relinquishing the hill east of Zonderfontein, retired south-east towards Dieplaagte, evidently fearing to be cut off by the turning movement of Gordon's brigade that was already advanced.

French now concentrated his attack on Boschpoort, to drive the enemy from that position. Alderson and his mounted troops on the north side pushed out eastward from Witklipbank at noon, followed later, so soon as his infantry closed up, by Hutton with a 5″ gun, while Gordon moved in the same direction as Alderson, but further south. Dickson, who was between the two and connected with Gordon by the 8th Hussars, moving north-east from Schoongezicht, was suddenly as he approached Boschpoort heavily fired on by about 1,000 of the enemy with three guns from the Hekpoort ridge. As our main advance proceeded they fell back to a position on the Vlakvarkfontein farm opposite Boschpoort on the right of the Wilge, but apparently surprised by Gordon's passage across the river at Dieplaagte, they gradually drew off in an easterly direction. Boschpoort once free of the enemy, Dickson moved south up the near bank of the Wilge, where he had orders to bivouac.

The Boers had placed a 12-pounder upon some rising ground south of Vlakvarkfontein, which brought both Dickson and Gordon within range, and at a distance of 8,000 yards maintained an incessant fire upon them till dark. From Dieplaagte Gordon drove the majority of the enemy in retirement south-east. He crossed the river, occupied the high ground on the further bank, and seized the hill beyond commanding the drift. Seeing this the Boers swerved off to the north-east and attempted to stay his advance with a heavy fire from three guns and a Vickers-Maxim across his front. Gordon answered with a brisk counter-fire till he had cleared the country in the neighbourhood of the drift, when he bivouacked on the hill above it.

Though the enemy's fire had been vigorous and well aimed, only one casualty occurred, Lieutenant

Elsworth of the Australian Horse being shot by a bullet through his heart. It was well after dark when Dickson reached his bivouac on the left bank of the Wilge near Dieplaagte. Alderson held the Wilgedrift at Boschpoort; Hutton's main column was five miles to the south-west, and headquarters stayed at Vanganfontein on the left bank adjoining Dieplaagte.

During the day Ian Hamilton had arrived at Rustfontein, well beyond Elands River station and five miles north of Bronkhurstspruit station, intending to move next day to Roodepoort, while Pole-Carew's division was on the march to Elands River station.

General French, having been directed to push round to the east and if possible cut off the enemy, believed that he was intended to carry out the old idea, cross the Olifants River, cut the communications and destroy the railway east of Middelburg, and, if chance offered, head him off by turning west. But he was mistaken; so wide a move was clearly not Lord Roberts's intention, and French's objective, to meet which he modified his dispositions, instead of Middelburg, was to be the railway in the neighbourhood of Brugspruit, 25 miles west of Middelburg.

On the morning of Tuesday, July 24th, it was found that the enemy had retired, and the column marched undisturbed north-east towards Schoengezicht, which they reached about eleven o'clock. Hutton had also made a start, but the late arrival of his convoy delayed him, and on reaching Vlakfontein he halted there for the day. The cavalry division had reached Schœngezicht shortly before noon, and another 10 miles would bring them to Waterpan. General French had kept a careful watch on the Olifants River on his right, having information that Dirksen's and Trichhardt's commandos under Louis Botha, which had

been opposed to him in the previous day's engagement, were now retreating. He saw in the withdrawal of these two commandos an indication of a general retirement on Middelburg, and he feared that from the west he would be powerless to intercept them.

Shortly before reaching Schoengezicht, Gordon's scouts reported a small rearguard of about 400 men on a ridge to their front, and it was soon found that the enemy, still in considerable strength with four or five guns, had taken up a very wide front from Hartebeestfontein, close to the railway, south-east to Tweefontein, 14 miles from flank to flank. Alderson, coming in touch with their right near Vlakfontein, engaged them; but finding they could make no impression on Alderson, and becoming aware of French's wide turning movement, the enemy threw their strength into their left, determined to make a firm stand against the advance of the cavalry. Scarcely had Gordon's brigade resumed its march, after watering and feeding the horses, than when moving on Waterpan they found the Boers occupying a position on high ground south-west of Grootpan. Deciding to dislodge them by a turning movement round their left, Gordon sent forward the Scots Greys with two guns to occupy a low ridge within range of the enemy's positions, and himself took the remainder of the brigade south-east by Zaiwater and Bosmansfontein to turn the enemy's left from the south. Dickson's brigade, coming up at this time, also joined in the attack on Grootpan.

The Boers, who were drawn from Dirksen's and Scholtz's commandos, opened a warm artillery fire, but their range was distant and their fire inaccurate and harmless.

Dickson's and Gordon's guns got within 3,800 yards, and detachments of dismounted cavalry to within 1,000

yards of the Grootpan plateau, yet our fire also seemed ineffective, though the Boers rode along their positions in full view, probably wishing to give us an exaggerated idea of their numbers. Towards the evening, however, as Gordon's turning movement towards Tweefontein developed, the Boers, perceiving their left and rear threatened, abandoned their positions and made off north-eastward.

Fighting at long ranges the attack on both sides had been chiefly confined to the artillery, reducing the total casualties to one officer killed and only one man wounded.

Hutton bivouacked at Vlakfontein and both Dickson's and Gordon's brigades at Tweefontein adjoining Waterpan.

General French was of opinion that the enemy had fallen back east of the Olifant's River leaving merely outposts behind them on the west. He realised the difficulty of trying to intercept them so long as they refused to come to close quarters and were bent on retreat, but he foresaw a very effective result from a movement of the cavalry across the river at Naauwpoort operating east of Middelburg. Such a manœuvre must certainly prevent the enemy from doubling back in our rear or retreating south-east, but it might take the cavalry further afield than the Commander-in-Chief would desire. Having been cut off from communication with Headquarters for two days, French had no choice but to carry out the remainder of his orders, and first make sure of the enemy's position at Brugspruit before engaging in another operation.

Up to a late hour that evening Alderson's mounted infantry, reconnoitring north and north-east of the position, had only met with a few Boer scouts. One patrol, reaching a farm two miles south of Balmoral at

midnight, secured a prisoner belonging to the German Corps, who stated that Balmoral had been evacuated on the previous day, and that the Boers had retired south of the railway in an easterly direction, a statement which Alderson's patrols soon verified. In these circumstances Hutton, thinking that French would make for a point east of the Olifants River, decided to support him by a movement on Waterpan.

Early the next morning, July 25th, French sent the Carabiniers towards Brugspruit station, and the Witbank Colliery station beyond, to ascertain whether or not the enemy had retired across the Olifants River eastwards. A little later Dickson, with O. battery and the 7th Dragoon Guards, marched on Groenfontein in support, if necessary, of the reconnaissance, leaving the 8th Hussars to support Gordon, who was moving with the 14th Hussars (less one squadron) and a section of G. battery towards Naauwpoort drift on the Olifants River immediately north of Wolvekrantz farm. Hutton was on the way to Waterpan, his patrols having reported the country clear between Balmoral and Brugspruit.

At noon news came in from Colonel Sprot, commanding the Carabiniers, from the colliery south-east of Brugspruit station, to the effect that 750 Boers, with several guns, had left Brugspruit that morning with the certain intention of making a stand at the river. Their camping-ground showed signs of very recent evacuation; the embers of the fires were not yet cold, and distant dust clouds along the road running parallel to the railway on the north side betokened the retreat of the enemy eastward. The advanced squadrons at Witbank had reported some guns passing the colliery that morning, while several bodies of Boers retreating from Brugspruit had occupied a

ridge north-east of it. As they opened fire on our men Sprot decided to engage them with dismounted troops and turn their left, in which O. battery, favourably placed by Sir John Jervis, largely assisted him.

Informed of the situation Dickson came up with the 7th Dragoon Guards, but found the enemy withdrawing and already out of range. Sprot continued his reconnaissance up to nightfall, and found the country clear for 12 to 14 miles east beyond the railway-bridge over the Olifants River.

As Gordon approached the river he was opposed from the right bank at Wolvekrantz, and he found that a hill on the left bank was also held; but feebly opposed by an irresolute, half-hearted enemy, he was soon across the drift and in occupation of the hill commanding it. In fact, so feeble was the Boers' resistance and so disorderly their retreat that within an hour all the hills on the east bank were in his possession, and he had sent detachments to secure the drift further down stream and clear the country round.

General French was on the ground soon after Gordon had established himself, and obtained a complete survey of the country right up to Middelburg. But the outlook was sadly disappointing. By a few hours' start the enemy had placed themselves beyond his reach, and clearly visible for miles on the main road alongside the railway on the north side was a complete block of wagons and horsemen, with the head of the column already close to Middelburg full seven miles away.

As the General stood taking in the scene, a tremendous thunderstorm burst with great violence. The rain came down in sheets, and darkness was closing in; the banks of the drift were slippery and our

horses tired; with such a long start against us pursuit for that night was clearly out of the question. For three days the skies had been too cloudy for communication by heliograph; uncertain of the main army's position, and knowing Lord Roberts's disapproval of a wide turning movement, there was nothing for French but to await daybreak before continuing operations.

On the next morning, however, satisfied that the advanced troops of the main movement must by this time either have reached or be near Brugspruit, he considered it his duty, apart from clearing the country round the river, to attempt to intercept the enemy's retreat. Unhappily the long delay caused by the condition of the drift made the task very hard if not impossible; but even a close pursuit must increase the disorder of the enemy, and he decided to advance with all haste to the line of the Klein Olifants River south-east of Middelburg. On a wide front, with his right pushed well forward, he hoped to prevent the enemy from doubling back and force him to retreat in a north-easterly direction. Hutton, making for Naauwpoort Drift, was to cross and continue the valuable support his column had already given in these operations. Dickson, south-east of Brugspruit station, was directed also to head for the drift and be on the right bank not later than seven on the morning of July 26th.

All night our troops were exposed to a pitiless downpour, and when the rain ceased, it was only to give place to a cold cutting wind that dealt cruelly with men and horses.

At nine o'clock on Thursday, July 26th, Gordon's brigade advanced east-north-east on the Goodhope and Bankfontein line. The Boers were on the alert,

and as the troops advanced from Goodhope they came under the fire of a 6″ gun mounted in a truck on the railway near Uitkyk, south-west of Middelburg. Several guns were also brought into action near Vaalbank, north-east of Goodhope, and hoping to check Gordon's advance east, the enemy moved south to Sterkwater to hold the high ground there. But the cavalry succeeded in getting further south below them, and occupied some rising ground offering just sufficient cover opposite to the Boer positions, Dickson's brigade moving into position two miles to Gordon's left.

The Boers brought their guns into action, and Gordon, supported by O. battery, at once responded. Soon after the engagement had begun, the enemy was reinforced by a body of men and three guns, coming from the direction of Middelburg. Gordon had reconnoitring patrols out, and now sent forward two regiments, but by this time the enemy's guns on the east were no longer visible, and though some Boers remained on the ridge, the main party had already abandoned their positions, and were retreating in a north-easterly direction.

General French made his bivouac on the deserted positions in the Sterkwater valley, which gave an excellent line of front, with outposts thrown out on the ridge to the left. The mounted infantry had pushed forward, and held the colliery at Vaalbank, practically commanding Middelburg five miles north; the cavalry's left was connected with the mounted infantry at Vaalbank, and the right extended four miles south-east nearly to Wolvefontein, while Hutton's main force was halted near Goodhope.

Headquarters were at Sterkwater, and a little later messages from Balmoral expressed pleasure

with the progress made. By that night French expected to be across, or close to, Olifants River, and hoped that the troops would be in or near Middelburg on the morrow. He was to be on his guard lest the enemy should drop back and attempt to circle round his right flank south, and was not to go beyond Middelburg, as the railway had suffered considerable damage which must be repaired before the general advance could be resumed.

Unfortunately the enemy had retreated before a further blow could be struck, but in their hurry they had left the railway undamaged as far as Rietpan station now in the hands of the cavalry.

In the next day's operations Hutton, whose force had made good progress, gradually hemming in large commandos in the Bethlehem Hills, was to reach Middelburg and occupy the town. Gordon's brigade, with the 8th and 14th Hussars, was to push forward and hold a line of front three miles in extent along the Klein Olifants River, its left towards Middelburg and Groenfontein, its right well out at Rondevlei. By nine o'clock on the morning of July 27th Hutton and his troops had entered and occupied Middelburg without opposition, the enemy making off pell-mell along every road leading east and north-east.

About the size of Kroonstad, Middelburg, in groups of pretty, well-built dwellings, nestles pleasantly in a sheltered hollow, where garden plots engross more space than houses. In and out, making flowers bloom and all green things grow the year round, run little lively streams that bring their clear welcome waters from two spruits lying east and west of the town, and they in turn join the Klein Olifants River skirting Middelburg above. Outside are bare downs, and in far faint outline to the north is the Bothasberg.

The cavalry remained on Sterkwater Hill till ten o'clock to support Hutton if necessary, and then marched to the Olifants River. After a faint resistance the line of country between Groenfontein on the left and Rondevlei on the right was occupied, and the outposts pushed on at once to a ridge east of the river. Hutton's infantry went into position east of the town. One detachment of mounted infantry proceeded to hold the bridge over Olifants River, while another occupied the bridge of the Klein Olifants River, both bridges having been left intact; the remainder reconnoitred along the road between Middelburg and Lydenburg.

Anxious to secure every point of advantage, General French considered the command of the passage across the Komati road by the roads to Belfast and Machadodorp of the utmost importance, distant 20 and 30 miles respectively from the cavalry's right at Rondevlei. All communication would thus be stopped between Machadodorp, where Kruger's and Botha's army had concentrated, and such forces as may still have been south, while the cavalry would also be enabled to turn any attempted defence of Machadodorp. To avoid loss of time till permission should arrive, General French began his preparations, always keeping as he believed to the spirit of his instructions; but evidently the force of cavalry was considered too small for the long journey, and he had to wait a few days till more troops had moved up towards Middelburg. The possession of this town, the next seat of the Transvaal Government after Pretoria, gave us a valuable section of the Delagoa Bay line.

General French's advance was marked by no important engagements, but the sharp actions, skirmish-

ing and sniping, which were matters of daily occurrence, harassed and obstructed him continually. It was a very trying march to both infantry and cavalry; great distances were covered, and often fighting would come at the end of a long day, while in the cold and wet the troops frequently found themselves separated from their kits and supplies. But the General was not to be gainsaid. He pushed on strenuously, resourceful in the application of his outflanking movements, and allowing the enemy no breathing space.

"There was no envelopment of collective Boer commandos caught in retreat without loophole of escape, no desperate Cronje held at bay," the critics complain, and "the General on Naauwpoort hill watched the escape of the Boer army." "And then" they go on, "once arrived at Middelburg, why was the pursuit not urged on more swiftly?" The indictment has no substance. Darkness and bad weather were no aids to bridge over the seven miles between the rear of the retreating Boers and our outdistanced cavalry. French's orders allowed him to advance no further than Middelburg, and his operations were restricted to a narrow sphere, not admitting an encircling movement wide enough to turn the Boers' retreat.

CHAPTER XIV

MIDDELBURG TO BELFAST

General French's favourite method with the Boers was, if possible, to keep them always moving, and thus to allow them no time to recover nerve and initiate fresh devices. This method had brought him much success, and now again seeing another opportunity, he was keen to harass them into weariness and a state of irresolute confusion, had not other considerations affecting the general scheme of advance called for a halt at Middelburg.

Although the pioneers of the advance, French's forces round Middelburg only took up their forward march on August 21st, and on the 26th, Belfast, a town higher set above the sea-level than any other in the Transvaal, fell into our hands.

The Commander-in-Chief calculated that it would be a full fortnight before the moment was ready for the army's progress east. The damage done to the railway-bridges over the Wilge River and the Bronkhurstspruit had to be righted to bring on the necessary supplies; more troops were needed to protect the lines of communication; and it was hoped that in the course of a week or two Sir Redvers Buller might have had time to arrive. Ian Hamilton's division

was also unavoidably withdrawn towards the north-west of Krugersdorp to join in the operations against De Wet, who was heading north. Lord Roberts and his Staff returned to Pretoria, and General French was placed in command of the advanced forces, including his own and Hutton's columns, and the 11th division under Pole-Carew.

A strong guard on the lines of communication was necessary, as the enemy that had retired on Machadodorp, finding the pursuit not followed up, would probably straggle back in detachments and attempt to damage the telegraph and railway.

General French constructed a careful plan of defence to screen Middelburg and the closer lines of communications from assault and annoyance. He threw out the cavalry, and drew a chain 21 miles in length from the Delagoa Bay line south, connecting that line with the Komati River. At first the defence stretched from Rietpanspruit, 10 miles out from Middelburg, down to the Klein Crocodile River, but later it was removed 28 miles further east along the line, in touch with the Komati River. The outer flank was thrown well forward to the east, and the inner flank rested on a strong pivot, strengthened with infantry and big guns on the Delagoa Bay line. This arrangement allowed the outposts a front of observation and watch over the enemy's movements from Belfast due south to the Komati River, across south-east to Ermelo, and to Bethal more south-west; posts were also established to the north and north-west, and reconnaissances organised north against Bothasberg, as far as Wagon Drift, 28 miles north-west at the junction of the Selous and Olifant's Rivers.

With a front of about 40 miles from the Olifant's River at Wagon Drift to the source of the Komati

River south-east, General French hoped to anticipate and check any movement of Botha and his 8,000 followers from Dalmanutha and Belfast, 45 miles up the line.

For the protection of the lines of communication Lord Roberts had made the following dispositions : the Welsh regiment and one 6-inch gun held Bronkhurst-spruit station ; one battalion of Stevenson's brigade were at the Wilge River crossing, two battalions of the same brigade and a 6-inch gun at Balmoral ; the Guards Brigade, naval and heavy guns, and Henry's mounted infantry were near Brugspruit, Colonel Barker being placed in charge of the lines of communication between Pretoria and Middelburg.

During the three weeks when French had command of the forces in the Middelburg district, the Boers made no attempt to retake any positions we had gained ; outposts and patrols had some skirmishing with small detachments of the enemy south-east and north, and they opposed our advance east on Wonderfontein, yet nothing in the nature of an engagement took place. But along the Bothasberg from Belfast north, bodies of Boers were known to be on the move ; probably, though nothing came of it, they had the intention of assisting De Wet and Steyn, should they succeed in eluding us at the Magaliesberg.

General French withdrew the 7th Dragoon Guards and attached them temporarily to Hutton's command, to watch a zone of country on the north from the Wagon Drift, following the Selous River down to Rietpan station. The 4th brigade being practically broken up, General Dickson was created military governor of Middelburg, responsible for the internal and external security of the town ; under his orders were placed seven companies of Suffolks,

detailed from Hutton's command, one composite squadron of cavalry, two horse-artillery guns, and one 5-inch gun. All undesirable persons were to be arrested and sent to Pretoria. General French insisted on the strict enforcement of martial law, as the town was known to be hostile, with a large element of anti-British Hollanders.

There was no rolling-stock beyond 12 trollies and the three colliery locomotives captured at the Landau coal mines, which General French organised into a rough supply service by rail from Wilge River to Rietpan station, over the 42 miles of line and a bridge that the Boers in their haste had left intact. The trucks, able to do the distance in six hours, carried from 30 to 40 tons, sufficient to furnish his troops for one day, a necessary expedient, as the Boers had emptied Middelburg of all supplies.

General French made the following dispositions for the defence of Middelburg and the neighbourhood: Two companies of Suffolks and a 5-inch gun, with a detachment of 30 mounted men, were entrenched, with strong wire entanglement in front and flanks, 1,200 to 1,500 yards south-east of Uitkyk station, on the crest of a long slope, two companies of infantry and two field-guns holding a similar position on a ridge close to the town on the north-west.

The reserve in town consisted of one regiment of cavalry, three companies of infantry, and 150 dismounted details.

Hutton's command extended from Rietpan Spruit on the south to Wagon Drift on the Olifant's River to the north. With Alderson's mounted infantry, four companies of infantry, four field-guns, one battery of horse-artillery, and two Vickers-Maxims, he held the Rietpan position and Bankfontein, 13 miles

north-east of Middelburg; a 5-inch gun, with one company of mounted infantry as escort, was placed on a hill two and a half miles north-east on the Lydenburg road. The 7th Dragoon Guards, with guns and two companies of infantry, held a post on the Doornkop slope 14 miles north.

Gordon's cavalry held a line of country from Rietpan station north to Rietkuil south.

Beyond, a wild and hilly country, bush-covered and treacherous, leads to the Wagon Drift, the only crossing in this region over the deep-channelled Olifant's River; the drift lies wedged in by the Bothasberg mountain range, while the bush veldt, the land of the Boer herdsman during the winter months, spreads northward over the horizon line.

Carefully General French surveyed the country to the east and south-east away to the Komati River, broad open downs suitable for the action of cavalry; it impressed him with the importance of an advance to Wonderfontein on the railway, with his front extended south to the headwaters of the Komati at the junction with the Bosmanspruit near Twyfelaar. In such a position it would be impossible for Botha to break round his right flank; he could turn the enemy at Belfast, and only a short movement of his right would be enough to make Machadodorp untenable, while Gordon, with a lessened line of defence, could keep a larger reserve in hand.

His patrols, after a careful reconnaissance of the ground, were convinced that it could be easily held, and two battalions of the Guards Brigade were accordingly brought up in anticipation, to reinforce the reserve at Middelburg.

Wednesday, August 1st, Gordon marched as arranged, and after some slight opposition on his

left flank at Wonderfontein, seized the station and succeeded in establishing himself on the line between Wonderfontein and Twyfelaar, by occupying Ged Kaalplaats, Strathrae, and Goedehope, and pushing out strong patrols to Twyfelaar. He placed his headquarters at Grootpan, midway between the two flanks. The only opposition met with were small bodies of the enemy, who threatened the line ineffectually, and a Boer patrol at Witkloof, east of Goedehope, that was driven off eastwards.

Gordon received information at Wonderfontein that both Louis Botha and Viljoen had slept there on Friday, July 28th, and had 400 men with them; another 4,000 had entrenched themselves at Machadodorp; Dalmanutha, halfway between Belfast and Machadodorp, was also fortified, and on July 30th, the Carolina and Bethal commandos were passing Wonderfontein to Belfast. Botha had 2,000 covered trucks with supplies along the railway; transport by road being impossible, the wagons had to travel by rail from Machadodorp to Waterval Onder. News also came that 6,000 Boers were in the bush-veldt between Zuikerboschkop, 25 miles north-west of Belfast, and the river valleys north of the Bothasberg as far as Olifant's River, but engaged in looking after their cattle they had no intention of fighting.

General French had the story confirmed of Viljoen and Buys with 1,500 men passing through Wonderfontein and coming to Machadodorp from the neighbourhood of the Natal railway by Carolina. He concluded that General Buller's front must by this time be almost clear, enabling the acceleration of his forward movement towards the Delagoa Bay line. Previous to his advance on July 31st, General French visited the 7th Dragoon Guards' post north-west of

Middelburg at Doornkop. Two squadrons, as part of Alderson's column, had already gone out on a reconnaissance into the bush-veldt to Klipplaatdrift and Buffelskloof 10 miles north-east, and were to co-operate with Alderson who had taken out his mounted infantry from Bankfontein to scour the country north-west to Wagon Drift. The country, with knolls and high-grown bush, becomes rougher and more steep northwards into the chain of the Bothasberg beyond Buffelskloof; an excellent country for such an enemy to fight in, but busy herding large numbers of cattle, he contented himself with sniping and small attacks at long range.

A body of Boers attacked Alderson from Kluitjesfontein; he shelled them in return, and drove them out of the hills into the mountains north at Klipnek, occupied their forsaken positions, bivouacked in them for the night, and after further reconnoitring towards Wagon Drift, brought his column back next day to Doornkop and Doornboom.

Reconnaissances and other sources of information went to show that the Boers were guarding all the entrances to the bush-veldt, and had extended their positions from Machadodorp westward across the Steelpoort Valley along the Bothasberg and Selous River to Olifant's River on the west bank of the Wilge River, and were in positions to co-operate with any movement that might develope towards them from the Magaliesberg across the Pietersberg railway. The commando of Trichardt and Du Toit held the Bothasberg position; Louis Botha with his main laager was at Witpoort, 21 miles north-west of Belfast; Machadodorp was commanded by Schalk Burger, and Dalmanutha on the railway between Belfast and Machadodorp was reported strongly

fortified; detachments of the Ermelo commandos were also reported near Carolina.

It was advisable to move a force east based on the Pretoria-Pietersberg railway towards Wagon Drift and beyond, clear the country between these points, with a possibility of encircling the enemy in the mountains, and leave to General French and Sir Redvers Buller's advancing columns the operations against the enemy's left, which extended down to the Komati River south of the line.

General French, taking into account the expected arrival of General Buller at Carolina on August 15th, and the likelihood of a further forward movement of the cavalry, believed he saw reasons for suggesting infantry reinforcements towards Wonderfontein, his own command up to this point to devolve upon Pole-Carew. With Buller's cavalry joined to his own column, French hoped to leave himself free, under Sir Redvers's orders, to push ahead and endeavour to force the enemy off the railway line towards Komati Poort, and perhaps branch off and seize Barberton.

Before any forward movement could take place, however, Lord Roberts found a delay of a few days, till August 20th, necessary to allow of the final arrangements for the general advance, and time for the reinforcements to reach Middelburg; but a general move beyond Noitgedacht, unless for the purpose of reconnaissance towards Barberton, did not seem advisable. General Buller, reaching Ermelo on the 11th and Carolina on the 15th, was to advance north on the 22nd straight for Machadodorp; Pole-Carew was timed to arrive at Machadodorp on the 24th; General Paget was coming up to Middelburg, and troops were being sent forward to relieve the Guards

and Stevenson's brigade. By August 14th Gordon's main body had reached Kranspan, 10 miles south-west of Carolina, and his outposts were in touch with Buller's cavalry at Twyfelaar.

General French, who had in person reconnoitred the country beyond the Komati River, directed Gordon to prepare for an advance 10 miles north-east to Witkloof on the main road between Belfast and Carolina,—the advance to be dependent on a simultaneous move on the part of Brocklehurst and his cavalry down the river to Twyfelaar. French, considering himself under the command of Sir Redvers Buller, suggested that Brocklehurst should go forward, but General Buller, apparently seeing little value in the movement, believed it best for the troops to remain as they were and wait for the general advance on August 21st. The orders given to Gordon were accordingly countermanded.

Meanwhile small skirmishes had taken place along the railway-line to the north, attacks were made on the outposts at Bankfontein and Noitgedacht, and Gordon's line was threatened; but on every occasion the enemy was repulsed with little loss or difficulty.

On August 11th a train, filled with 200 Boer women and children, passed beyond our outposts five miles from Wonderfontein to join the laager at Belfast. General Ben Viljoen the next day asked for an armistice until midnight of the 15th, that these women might be removed from Belfast. General French replied in the negative; but he promised that no offensive movements should be made against Belfast until after that date, and that in no circumstances would he do anything likely to endanger the lives of the women and children.

Pole-Carew now took over the command from

Middelburg to Wonderfontein, with Hutton under him, holding the line from Doornkop to Middelburg. Clements was on his way up with five battalions of infantry, two batteries, and 200 mounted troops to garrison Belfast, Machadodorp, and Waterval Onder, which would leave Buller's and Pole-Carew's divisions free for field operations. French with his Staff left Middelburg on Saturday, August 18th, and established his headquarters at Goede Hoop, about three miles from the Komati River and some 14 miles south-east of Wonderfontein station. Dickson's brigade was guarding the front from Wonderfontein to Strathrae, and Gordon's from Dickson's right to the Komati River. Brocklehurst, with the 2nd cavalry brigade of the Natal Field Force, was to the west, in the rear of Gordon's right, covering Buller's division, which was encamped on both banks of the Komati River near Twyfelaar.

The Boers, lying quiet south of the railway, lighted veldt fires near Van Wyk's Vlei, opposite Strathrae, to conceal their evident intention of falling back from the rising ground they held there.

Some little excitement occurred when the Carabiniers on Gordon's right proceeded to establish connection between him and Brocklehurst. It appeared that Brocklehurst had withdrawn his cavalry at nightfall behind the infantry outposts, thus affording an opportunity to the enemy of which they were not slow to take advantage, pressing the outposts in their retirement and also sniping into Gordon's flank picket uncovered by the withdrawal of Brocklehurst's cavalry. This brisk skirmish resulted in several of our men being wounded.

Arrangements for the general advance were now almost complete. The numbers of the opposing enemy were estimated at 8,500; of these 2,500 were

reported at Dalmanutha under Louis Botha, 500 on the Lydenburg road, 800 guarding the prisoners at Noitgedacht, 1,000 down the line to Komati Poort, and perhaps another 1,000 in the low country about Machadodorp, scattered commandos from the south making up the remainder.

It was soon known that Buller would, for the present, confine all his movements to the north valley of the Komati River, and that he intended to proceed to Van Wyk's Vlei east of Strathrae on the following morning (Sunday, August 20th), availing himself of the cavalry on his left to maintain contact with Wonderfontein, and be in position to cross over to his right and operate afterwards on the enemy's railway communication near Noitgedacht. But the move was postponed over the next day, and General French used the interval to inspect all the outposts of the 1st brigade. In the course of inspection some 20 Boers, espying the General and his party, opened fire upon them from a hill two miles north-west of Twyfelaar at 2,000 yards range, but no damage was done. On the morning of Tuesday, August 21st, the cavalry marched to Blesbokspruit, adjoining Van Wyk's Vlei, and took possession unopposed.

French rode across to Van Wyk's Vlei, and ascertained that the cavalry were to make no further move on the following morning, as Sir Redvers, on account of the late arrival of his transport, considered it necessary to halt for another 24 hours. During the day his mounted troops on the right had been engaged with about 200 Boers, who were posted on a strong hill, but, supported by half a battalion of infantry, they had beaten the enemy off.

As Buller's advance was to be continued the next morning (Thursday, August 23rd), the cavalry were directed to Geluk farm, Sir Redvers intending to bring the remainder of his force to a point not quite so far. At nine in the morning Gordon's brigade, with one regiment of the 4th brigade attached, led the way, followed on their left rear half an hour later by the rest of the 4th brigade in echelon formation. Gordon had been directed to take the long ridge east of Geluk, which strikes from north to south, with a steep fall to the west and a gradual broad slope to the east. Shortly before noon he reached the base of the ridge, and meeting with little opposition was able to occupy the west brow. Here he was joined later by Buller's cavalry, and was thus able to cover the left flank of Sir Redvers, who was moving up to attack a ridge north-east of Geluk held by about 300 of the enemy, which he hoped would clear his front and right flank. The ridge was successfully taken, and the cavalry outposts, dropping into the position vacated by the enemy, held a line that extended from Buller's south flank north towards the railway-line. But numbers of Boers were hanging about close to our outpost lines and succeeded in cutting off a company of the Liverpools before nightfall, and next day prevented Gordon's patrols from reconnoitring north-east towards Dalmanutha, while Buller's force remained halted at Geluk. On the other hand detachments of Dickson's brigade were out north and north-west and gained touch with Pole-Carew, who was then within reach of Belfast. By the 25th the Commander-in-Chief had reached Belfast with the 11th division, and Generals Buller and French rode across to meet him at the station.

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1. GENERAL FRENCH'S MARCH TO MIDDELBURG.

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2, 3. GENERAL FRENCH'S MARCH FROM MIDDELBURG TO BELFAST.

1. DRIVING IN CAPTURES OF HORSES AND SHEEP.

2. SIR REDVERS BULLER'S CAMP AT GELUK.

3 SIR REDVERS BULLER'S HEADQUARTERS, ETC., AT GELUK.

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CHAPTER XV.

BELFAST TO WATERVAL ONDER.

AFTER his interview with the two generals Lord Roberts decided that the enemy should be pushed back from a strong position they were holding beyond Belfast towards Machadodorp. Buller's force was to advance direct on Machadodorp, by Dalmanutha, from the south-east; the 11th division, with French's cavalry on their left flank, was to strike the road between Lydenburg and Machadodorp by an advance north, with a view to turning the Boers' right flank, which was known to be very strong, and possibly intercepting their retreat into the Lydenburg valleys, and then to continue east.

In pursuance of these plans Buller fought the successful action of Bergendal, by Dalmanutha, and the Boers, fearing French's approach on their right flank, hastened their retreat, and were beyond Helvetia, on the Lydenburg road, before the cavalry could overtake them. French at once pushed on from Helvetia eastward to the relief of our men at Noitgedacht. Freed from captivity on his approach, the prisoners joined him at Waterval Onder, and soon after the 11th division came up.

Meanwhile Buller, heading onward towards Lydenburg, was delayed in the Crocodile valley by the

enemy, who in their retreat had seized the semi-circular ridges commanding it, and also Kopje Aleen Hill at Badfontein.

Ian Hamilton was sent to co-operate with Buller with a flying column made up at Belfast. They moved north by Dullstroom, intending to threaten the Boers' right flank; but the enemy, espying them from the Crocodile hills, at once relinquished their positions, and a safe road was thus ensured for the combined column to Lydenburg.

Buller was left with the task of clearing the Lydenburg country from Alkmaar, on the Delagoa Bay line, by Spitzkop to Pilgrim's Rest: Pole-Carew moved east by the railway down to Godwaan station, closely followed by Ian Hamilton; and French, who was back with his division at Machadodorp, was to go by Carolina, seize Barberton, and turn the Boers' left flank.

The country through which French had orders to make his way, by a wide detour north of Machadodorp to Waterval Onder, presented a chain of difficulties to the cavalry, with the worrying tactics of the enemy to be encountered amid a pile of mountains seamed with water-courses. North of Belfast it bears the common physical features of South Africa, lofty plateaus, craggy kloofs, and great, deep-ravined valleys. A wedge of high veldt extends from Belfast to Dullstroom, and breaks away north-west into the Steelpoort valley, with its deep courses and abrupt falls of a thousand feet.

French took the road which skirts the edge of this table-land, till at Zwartkopjes he branched off east, crossed the Elandsfontein Pass, and making his way along a high ridge with precipitous sides eventually reached the grassy plateau of Helvetia, whence by a

road, with several steep pitches in it, he came down into the low-lying valley of Waterval Onder.

Lord Roberts having decided that the cavalry should accompany Pole-Carew's column north-eastward, the 1st and 4th brigades marched at five on the morning of Sunday, August 26th, and reached Belfast station at eight, a distance of 12 miles.

The enemy was holding the series of hills, about five miles north-west, from which they had shelled the station the night before. These hills had to be cleared before the column could advance on Machadodorp by the northern road passing through Zwartkopjes, and French decided on a wide move to the north-westward.

At nine in the morning the 1st brigade, with the 14th Hussars, led off west, keeping to the south of the railway. Striking north they seized the ridge east of Boschpoort without opposition, and apparently unobserved.

Parties of the enemy met the advance column on the hills west and south-west of Langkloof farm, and opened fire with three guns from the stronghold of hills south of Zuikersboskop. General French despatched the Inniskillings down the steep Steelpoort valley to threaten the road leading to Witpoort, and frustrate any attempted extension or flanking movement of the enemy. Closer in, the Scots Greys crossed the spruit south of Weltevreden farm, and, regardless of heavy shelling from a high velocity gun and two Vickers-Maxims and hot rifle fire, seized the ridge on which the farm stands. The battery of the 1st brigade opened fire by sections from three different places, causing the enemy's guns to withdraw more to the north; while the 4th brigade, taking up ground to the east, prolonged our right beyond

the 1st, and moved across the spruit of Langkloof farm.

The eastern extension of the spruit was held by about 300 Boers, and the advance-squadron of the 4th brigade, pressing forward, met the shock of a hot Mauser fire. All the guns of the division were trained on to the kopjes that formed the main Boer position, and Pole-Carew's heavy guns came in with a cross-fire. The combined attack soon began to make an impression, and by about two in the afternoon the Boers began to falter under our concentrated fire, and at last gave ground before the 4th brigade. About the same time the 1st brigade took over a tall bouldered sugar-loaf hill about three miles south-west of Langkloof farm, where early in the action the Boers had placed their guns.

The day was nearly ended; the position that was to be the objective had been gained; the horses were used up: General French therefore decided to halt, making Weltevreden farm his headquarters. The 1st brigade bivouacked on the spruit below the steep hill, the 4th brigade three miles higher up stream. The Inniskillings,—delayed from joining their brigade at dark by about 200 Boers who engaged them on the steep, awkward slopes of the hill into the Steelpoort valley—were forced to bivouac three miles west of Weltevreden farm. The transport, kept back by the crossing of the drift, halted at nightfall near Weltevreden farm, but eventually pushed on to their brigades.

The 11th division, which had advanced to Lakenvlei north of Belfast, were strongly opposed all day on their right front and right flank by a long-range Creusot, a pom-pom, and another gun; but when night came their front was clear, though the enemy still threatened their right flank.

The cavalry had made a gallant and stubborn stand. Very weak in numbers, they had steadily opposed 500 Boers and three guns in a strong, natural position, and, admirably handled, had gained important ground. Lord Roberts was well pleased, and required General French to direct his next move northward, taking means to compel the removal of a 100-pounder at Waterval, which had been harassing the 11th division n their advance to Lakenvlei. French might either dvance eastward from his present position, or dislodge he enemy from Swartkopjes, and then pursue the nain road to Winaarspoort on to Machadodorp. Did ie *not* feel himself strong enough to force the posi- ion, a battalion of infantry would be sent towards 'wartkopjes in support.

French considered it essential to clear Zwartkopjes, ie road leading that way being the only approach he ould perceive by which the 11th division could enter lachadodorp; and he believed his move would be est supported by Pole-Carew pushing forward his oops north as quickly as possible. He judged the iemy to be retiring north, and foresaw little trouble clearing the forward way.

At half-past nine on Monday, August 29th, Gordon's igade with the 14th Hussars marched towards wartkopjes by the road passing on the west side of ingkloof farm, Dickson following in support on his ght rear. From the hill-top high above Weltevreden m the look-out discovered 200 Boers, with six or ven wagons, moving at a distance of four miles in a rtherly direction towards Dullstroom; but except a few shots exchanged with Gordon's advanced uts, the enemy offered no opposition.

Gordon's brigade, extended on a very wide front of out three miles, crossed the Lydenburg and Dull-

stroom road and moved by Vlakplaats north-east towards Middlespruit, with the outer regiment on the left passing along Zwartkopjes, Dickson's brigade working in with the movement, his outer regiment on the right following up along the Lakenvlei spruit south-east of Middelspruit.

The General halted early in the afternoon to reconnoitre in the direction of Machadodorp, and give time for the transport column to arrive. This had been sent east by the Dullstroom road from Belfast; passing Lakenvlei it came under the fire of a heavy Creusot gun, and was constrained to take cover and park till nightfall, when it resumed its march in the darkness.

So far successful, French was to advance south and south-east early next morning to secure Elandsfontein or Winaarspoort, and turn the enemy out of a position from which he might seriously harass the advance of the 11th division.

A reconnaissance during the afternoon disclosed the enemy holding an entrenched position, with two guns, across the road between Belfast and Dullstroom, two miles and a half north of Zwartkopjes, which was sufficient proof that French by facing north had succeeded in misleading the Boers into believing that his intentions were in that direction; indeed they were extending their position considerably westward in the fear that he would seek to turn their right and get in to Lydenburg. But, content with the feint and not wishing to draw aside from his main objective, he placed a sufficient force to hold the enemy in front and arrest any movement to south and east while his own south-eastern movement by Elandsfontein was in progress.

French had decided to concentrate his entire com-

mand near Zwartkopjes, and by nine o'clock on the morning of the 28th the troops were assembled in a hollow half a mile to the south. Dickson's two regiments remained as a containing force on Zwartkopjes, while towards them moved Henry's mounted infantry from Lakenvlei, with the Guards' Brigade following close behind. Gordon's brigade moved south-east towards the Elandsfontein heights, keeping well concealed from the Boers' position on the north; and avoiding as much soft ground as possible, the country being very boggy in these parts, they took the road leading over two very bad drifts to Middelpoort farm, four miles off. For eight miles beyond Middelpoort the road goes across steep hills rising 1,500 to 2,000 feet to the Elandsfontein Mountain pass. Hardly had the cavalry crossed the Middlespruit Drift than they were detected by the Boers, who were moving hurriedly across a ridge to the east; but our men were already safely in positions commanding the drift from the east-north-east and south, and after some shelling were able to push on and seize a ridge half way to the Elandsfontein height commanding an extensive view. They could plainly discern gun-emplacements on the summit of the height and objects moving along the sky-line.

The summit was our objective, four miles away. It took the cavalry an hour to reach a point in the ascent whence the guns could obtain a good range; the mountain was shelled, but it became clear after a time that the emplacements were empty. Some squadrons went forward to threaten the flanks of the position west and east, while Gordon's guns searched the top of the mountain. After shelling for half-an-hour, some squadrons of the Scots Greys, urging their horses up the stony sides, scrambled to the summit,

and gained the key to the surrounding country. An Englishman, from the adjoining farm of Vlakfontein, stated that the enemy, about 200 in all, had hastily left the mountain the moment our guns had come into action; and yet they had made every preparation for a stern resistance, with elaborate defences, gun-epaulments protected by sacks of earth, with shell-proof cover hewn out of the rock, and great props of wood which had been hauled up from below. We could now see what General French would have encountered had he come that way straight from Lakenvlei, as the Boers had fully expected, instead of choosing the wide flank movement.

The mountain commanded a magnificent panorama. Machadodorp lay in full view, and Buller's troops could be seen at that moment entering the little township.

In the mountain land to the east (well called Helvetia), some seven or eight miles away, considerable numbers of Boers were about in scattered parties, and along the road on the north side dust clouds betrayed a moving line of convoys. French, in occupation of the ground two miles to the east of the mountain, made every endeavour to get command of the Machadodorp-Lydenburg road with his guns, but failed to secure the range. It was soon known that Lord Dundonald's mounted troops, pushing forward to Helvetia, had been stopped half-way by a large body of retreating Boers, the men whom Buller had beaten the day before, and who now, with four guns, were posted on a ridge commanding Helvetia. An attack was contemplated next morning, with some idea of French co-operating from the west; but he, believing the enemy, instead of remaining at Helvetia, to be already in full retreat eastward, con-

sidered it his business to follow them at daybreak next morning, and if held back at Helvetia on the way, assist Dundonald to turn them out of that position. Having obtained the necessary leave, French prepared to advance early next morning, and orders were issued for one squadron from the 1st brigade with a detachment of pioneers to march at five o'clock on Wednesday, August 26th, by Helvetia on Waterval Onder. The situation was to be cleared and the roads improved as far as possible for the remainder of the cavalry and the transport to follow half an hour later.

French's headquarters were at Vlakfontein farm on the north-east side of Elandsfontein Mountain. Pole-Carew, with the Guards, a 5-in. gun, some naval 12-pounders, and a field-battery, had reached Middelpoort farm after a hard march, and was in hopes of pushing well forward the next day to support French in his advance on Waterval Onder.

Next morning an early start was made, but the road and the weather were both very bad. For the first four miles the way lay along a wretched cattle-track, high up above deep valleys, the tortuous line of direction being nearly blotted out by a thick clinging mist and a drizzling rain. The troops struggled on among the mountains through broken ground and hacked-up sluits, till half-way to Helvetia the road grew somewhat better. The heights above were crowned in succession by the cavalry, and Helvetia was reached a little before noon; only a few patrols and some slight interchange of shots gave sign of the enemy.

At Helvetia were some of Buller's mounted troops from Machadodorp, a few of whom were now attached to French.

Entering the valley which leads down to Waterval Onder some of the cavalry became engaged with the rearguard of the retreating Boers, but they were directed not to follow up the encounter.

The advance had been much retarded by rain, fog, and bad country, and the day being too far gone to allow of an effective occupation of Waterval Onder, which lies low in a deep gorge, French decided to remain for the night at Doornhoek on the high ground above and to secure the station next morning. Before sunset the fog had lifted and cleared the view for miles to eastward, and French could now see how cruelly unfit those sheer jagged mountains, with their deep gorges, were for the work of cavalry. But beyond Waterval Onder at Noitgedacht were the prisoners waiting, and they must be relieved. This relief he felt to be his first and most pressing duty, and, should the country haply prove less unfavourable than it looked, he hoped to push on towards Noitgedacht, for which he was granted permission. But amid precipices, ravines, and deep rocky bottoms the attempted cavalry movement was impossible; the railway was the only road, and that again was commanded by snipers in the mountains flanking the valley to the south.

His aim being Noitgedacht, French's next move was to descend into the valley, occupy Waterval Onder, and drive the sniping parties from the heights along the line, with the object of gaining the railway, while on Thursday, August 30th, Waterval Boven was occupied and a squadron of the 14th Hussars occupied the heights above the railway to the south.

Waterval Onder was taken under fire from the mountains south, which were still held by a rearguard of the Ermelo and Bethal commandos and

some Italians. As the troops passed through the village they were annoyed by continual sniping, but in retaliation they made prisoners of 30 Boers.

Waterval Boven, perched on the high level of the Elands valley, is connected with Onder lying far below by an important section of railway construction. The drop is so steep (a gradient of one in eight) that foothold on the incline is almost impossible; a third cogged rail runs in the centre of the ordinary gauge, and this section of the railway is run on the cogwheel system.

A careful reconnaissance discovered everything intact, save a small culvert destroyed near Waterval Onder.

During the day, while the cavalry was engaged in driving off the sniping parties from the heights towards Noitgedacht, the welcome news came in of the release of the prisoners. With French at Waterval Onder, the Boers realised that Noitgedacht had become insecure, and deciding to relinquish it, the prisoners must either be taken with them or set free. Among them were the Gloucesters and Royal Irish Fusiliers, taken at Nicholson's Nek, who had been in confinement for close on 11 months. They were all given their liberty, and hearing of French's near neighbourhood, they were soon making their way on foot along the railway to Waterval Onder. Weak and underfed, it was pitiable to watch them toiling up the steep hill above the station, too steep for many of them that night, anxious as they were to rejoin their friends and realise that they were indeed once more free. The first to arrive were Lieutenants Rundle of the Carabiniers, Davis of O. battery, and Humbie of the Imperial Yeomanry; soon after came Harris, Ennismore, Montgomery, Donelly, and

Leitrim, all of the Imperial Yeomanry; nine officers and 1,697 men in all arrived during the day and were camped next to the cavalry bivouac, sharing in such supplies as the cavalry had at their disposal. To the general chagrin, the returned captives had to tell of the removal of 30 officers and 20 yeomanry of their number eastward towards Nelspruit. The next day, August 31st, the whole party were on their way by rail to Pretoria. Their news was that President Kruger, Steyn, Schalk Burger, Lucas Meyer, and Dr. Heyman, who had left Waterval Onder the afternoon before French's arrival, had left Noitgedacht in a train for Nelspruit further down the line; Botha and Viljoen, with a bodyguard of 400, arrived that day from the same direction, were in a kloof south of Noitgedacht. The day after, 3,000 of the enemy, mostly foreigners, had come in, and were sent off in ox-wagons. A train, they said, ran daily to Komati Poort, and 25 field-guns and pom-poms had passed for Nelspruit three weeks ago. All the Boer women and children were in Barberton, also five Colonial officers and a number of convicted Boers, unwilling to fight and kept as prisoners; it was rumoured that President Kruger intended making his escape to France, and that a steamer was waiting for him in Delagoa Bay.

The inhabitants of Waterval Onder reported how Kruger would preach daily to the Boers, exhorting them to fight, and assuring them help would certainly come from France. Lord Roberts, he told them, had returned to England, and General French had been buried in Pretoria; they added that 1,500 Boers had passed through on their way to Barberton. So far as information went it seemed that 2,000 of the enemy were north of the railway near Lydenburg,

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SCENERY AT WATERVAL ONDER.

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3,000 on the railway towards Godwaan station, and 2,000 south of the railway.

The Commander-in-Chief, perceiving that the cavalry could not adequately co-operate in such a country, altered their course towards Barberton, a change which promised good results. Pole-Carew had brought up his division to Waterval Onder, and been placed in command of the position; and French, hoping to march by Helvetia, Machadodorp, and Dalmanutha, was directed to return without delay towards Belfast.

CHAPTER XVI

BARBERTON

I

Machadodorp to Barberton

PERHAPS during the whole course of General French's South African campaign no task brought him more labour and forethought, or called for greater daring, than the occupation of Barberton in the De Kaap valley.

The mind of the Commander-in-Chief was made up. Barberton must be secured, and that part of the country cleared. He desired to gain possession of the Delagoa railway between Godwaan and Komati Poort, and to lay hold of the accumulated rolling-stock collected at the latter place. South of the railway and connected with it by a branch line coming in at Kaapmuiden, Barberton was an important commissariat depôt of the enemy. All the refugee families that Lord Roberts had sent through his lines and made over to General Botha were gathered there, besides many of our captured officers. Moreover, numbers of the enemy, known to be in the De Kaap valley, would have to be swept up before we could push our way through to the Poort.

Beset with innumerable physical difficulties and unknown hazards, the responsibility devolving on General French was great, requiring courage and nerve in the highest degree. From the moment of leaving the main line of communication all support was cut off, and he was dependent upon his own resources. The nine or ten days' supplies that he had with him would not go far should he sustain a check before reaching Barberton. The march led him into an undiscovered country, in great part away from the main roads, by Kaffir tracks, up tiers of mountain heights which assail the invaders with peaks and precipices and engulfing gorges,—treacherous places, offering every advantage to enemies in ambush.

The De Kaap miner of old days will recollect the hardship and uncertainty of his journey to the gold-district. He will tell of the sudden scenic changes, of the gradual rise above the heat of the high veldt, till, before you are aware, what appears a Wiltshire down has lifted to the height of Snowden with a deep drop far below. Then follow, as far as the Komati stream, valleys closed in by alpine cliffs intersected with rapid torrents. At Hlomohlom the mountains begin to rise again, and by Nelshoogte Pass they tower aloft over Barberton, a sun-scorched little town deep in the De Kaap valley below. There is but one outlet to the valley, the De Kaap River, that pushes between the Avoca Pass on the north; formerly it held a great lake, the miners say, which at last burst on the eastern side and ran through the hills. And yet all this romance and loveliness offered to military enterprise a problem of bewildering complexity.

Little wonder if, with such a series of defences in their favour, the Boers in Barberton remained totally

unprepared for the coming of French, and saw with consternation the cavalry drop unheralded into their midst.

General French's route lay south from Machadodorp by Carolina, and thence continued east. Leaving Machadodorp five miles to the south, the country dips into the Komati valley, situated 1,000 feet lower than Belfast; the road passes through a narrow valley about a mile wide to the Komati River, follows one of the spurs of the high veldt by Bonnefoi Hill, mounting 600 feet in zig-zag to the top of the broad plateau, and follows straight on to Carolina. It continues east along another spur, rising to a height of 300 feet at the Roodehoogte Pass, to fall again abruptly 1,000 feet into the valley of the Buffelspruit. The road, which is the old Natal coach-road, follows the drop of the valley, crosses the Komati at Hlomohlom above its confluence with the Buffelspruit, and then climbs the steep height of Nelshoogte to the raised mountain level. In a bend it strikes north-east, and finally drops by the Chute into the low-lying valley of Barberton.

French, with his main column and transport, passed safely over Nelshoogte. Having turned the Boer flank, the General himself, his Staff, and the main portion of the cavalry proceeded to take a short cut along a precipitous goat's track by the Devil's Knuckles, which landed them in the De Kaap valley. The movement totally upset the enemy's calculations, who incontinently fled before the approach of the little party of horsemen, leaving Barberton, the supply depôts and rolling-stock to fall a helpless offering into their hands. Finding the enemy barring the way at Roodehoogte and Nelshoogte, against great odds French successfully attacked and outmanœuvered

them, and triumphing over all the physical impedimenta of the country led his troops into safety, thus opening the way and furnishing the supplies for Lord Roberts's column under Pole-Carew and Ian Hamilton, enabling them to proceed by the Kaapsche Hoop and De Kaap road to Nelspruit and Komati Poort, where the last vestige of Kruger's power was broken and dispersed.

It was an enterprise calling for those special qualities which are General French's greatest gift,—courage, self-reliance, and readiness for responsibility. Always prepared to make the best of a situation, he would, so far as might be, refrain from harassing his chief for orders, and, to such an extent did he inspire confidence in his troops, that he was justified in believing that they could succeed in an undertaking which appeared beset with every possibility of disaster.

To Barberton two roads lay open, both possible for the passage of the cavalry and the transport. One, from Machadodorp south-east by Schoenwater and Racesbaan across the Komati River at Hlomohlom, follows the old Natal road north-east by Tafelkop into Barberton; the other, sweeping wide through Carolina, goes north-eastward to Hlomohlom. Off the roads the precipitous country west and south-west of Barberton was impossible for the progress of mounted troops. Well pleased to introduce anything in the nature of a surprise into his plans, General French decided on the Carolina route, gave out his intention of marching on Ermelo, and thus misled the enemy completely.

On September 9th General Ben Viljoen telegraphed to the State President: "Enemy's cavalry trekking in the direction of Ermelo, and according to report the Standerton and Ermelo commandos are following

them." This was followed by a telegram from the Commandant-General at Nelspruit to General Smuts at Lake Chrissie: "You appear to be going to Ermelo to stop enemy, who is trekking in that direction. You are not to do that under any circumstances. Your task now is to guard road leading to Barberton. Send trustworthy scouts to discover movements of enemy in direction of Ermelo." A final message from the Assistant-Commandant of Meyer's and Viljoen's laager to General Smuts, was to this effect: "Commandant Joubert reports that the commandos of Ermelo and Standerton are following enemy, who is trekking to Ermelo. I cannot believe it, though, because then the enemy will have the opportunity of trekking in behind them to Roodehoogte. It is also reported that enemy is trekking in the direction of Carolina-Roodehoogte, so beware and look out—Telegraph how things are, and how much you know about enemy's advanced outposts."

At nine o'clock on the morning of Friday, August 31st, the cavalry division left for Helvetia, reached Machadodorp at two in the afternoon, and bivouacked there. Lord Roberts being expected from Belfast at Waterval Boven at nine the next morning, French issued orders for two squadrons of Dickson's brigade to leave at daylight, to observe the country south of the railway, and prevent any sniping at the train conveying the Commander-in-Chief; but all was quiet, and the only Boers to be seen, some 40 in number, retired on the approach of the cavalry. He himself rode to Waterval Boven to report and take his orders, and obtained Lord Roberts's consent to the Carolina route. His column was to be reinforced from Middelburg by Mahon's command.

The question of supplies was a most important one.

Wishing to save time, so as to be able to concentrate at Carolina by September 9th, French proposed sending Gordon's brigade south to Welgelegen, in order to secure the Komati crossing; Dickson was to pick up the supply column at Dalmanutha and join Gordon; and both were to march Wednesday, September 5th, on Carolina. All empty wagons were to proceed to Wonderfontein, fill up with six days supplies (making provision for nine days in all), and come on to Carolina escorted by Mahon's force. But the arrangements were ordered otherwise.

A supply train, which was expected at Machadodorp next morning (Sunday, September 2nd), unfortunately failed to come up, either that day or the following, thus delaying the general advance. However, Gordon's brigade was sent on towards Carolina, and bivouacked nine miles south at Zevenfontein. The patrols met a few snipers retiring eastward, and the enemy was discovered in occupation of the high ground some distance south of the Komati River and of the hill south of Bonnefoi.

Meantime, in addition to Mahon's mounted troops, French's force had been augmented by a battalion of the Suffolks, two field-artillery guns, and one battalion of the Shropshires escorted by two squadrons of cavalry.

On Tuesday, September 4th, French, with Dickson's brigade, and the mule and ox convoy complete (save for 16 wagons of the latter), followed Gordon. The oxen were in very bad condition, and on the short nine miles to Zevenfontein a great number dropped and died.

Gordon, relieved by Dickson, now pushed on three miles and occupied the hills above the narrow valley to cover the transport on the Carolina road at

Welgelegen and command the Komati bridge from the north-east. He met with opposition from some Boers on a hill to the east of Welgelegen, but forced them from his path with small loss.

Dickson bivouacked at Zevenfontein, followed by the 16 wagons under an escort of the 7th Dragoon Guards. Gordon remained at Welgelegen till the head of the convoys, which had left Zevenfontein on September 5th, reached his bivouac, when he moved off across the Komati River by Grobelaar's bridge, a solid stone structure of four arches, and occupied the hills above Bonnefoi, commanding the river from the south. Dickson followed, and reached the bridge without any casualties, despite some sniping. But the convoys found the steep Bonnefoi hill a tough job; double ox-spans scarcely sufficed to carry them up the rough, climbing way, and the night had fallen long before the last teams dragged their dead load of hulking wagons to the easier ground above.

Headquarters were at Bonnefoi, 10 miles from Zevenfontein; Dickson's brigade bivouacked to the north, Gordon's holding the hills to the south-east.

At six in the evening a reconnoitring squadron returned from Carolina with news to the effect that Fourie and Venter's commando from Standerton and Heidelberg, with about 600 men and three guns, were north-east along the Komati River, while Tobias Smuts, with 800 men and three guns, was 30 miles north-east near Hlomohlom on the Barberton road.

In the chill mists of the early morning, September 6th, the march was resumed, 12 miles of road covered by noon, and the town of Carolina occupied. Save for the usual sniping, the only incident was a concealment of 20 Boers east of the road at De Klerc's farm, in wait to entrap a patrol. But their ruse cost

us no more than one man wounded, and we burned their farm in penalty.

The same day Mahon, by a forced march from Pretoria to Wonderfontein, led his command into Carolina; the Suffolks accompanied him, and the Shropshires (under Spens) marched in from Belfast. Mahon had been with Ian Hamilton in his pursuit of De Wet, and would have joined the cavalry sooner, but for being delayed by rendering assistance to a detachment of 150 Canadians, attacked in their station at Noitgedacht by a superior number of the enemy. He had heard guns as he left Wonderfontein; but believing the firing to be in the direction of Lydenburg, where Buller was operating in conjunction with Ian Hamilton, Mahon continued his march. He had not gone five miles on his way when a Canadian horseman rode up, reporting their garrison at Noitgedacht heavily attacked. Mahon at once turned his column and went straight off at a sharp trot to their support. Reining up close to the town he found that the Canadians had held their own gallantly, and were no longer in need of assistance. Turning once more on his tracks, therefore, Mahon resumed the road to Carolina, where he arrived on September 6th.

General French was obliged to postpone his march till Sunday, September 9th, partly to feed up the cattle on the good grazing-ground about Carolina, and also because Lord Roberts anticipated serious difficulties in the matter of supplies on the march to Barberton. The road from Belfast being too unsafe to risk filling up his empty wagons by that, French chose to be guided by circumstances, and, if necessary, place men and horses on reduced rations. Supposing the roads to be accessible (and French scarcely believed they could be), then there was one chance for refilling his wagons.

Hutton was to co-operate with French from the north. With Alderson's mounted infantry, Brabant's Horse, and 500 of Henry's mounted infantry,—about 1,000 in all, and 10 guns—he had left on Saturday, September 8th, for the Kaapsche Hoop Heights (Devil's Kantoor), his road taking him from Machadodorp by Welgeluk and Uitkomst to Tafel Kop, and thence to Kaapsche Hoop. Tafel Kop was the point which French must pass coming from the south-east, and assuming the road from Uitkomst possible for wheeled transport, thither, to Tafel Kop, Lord Roberts proposed to send supplies for French's column. Otherwise the Barberton Road, and later on the railway, was the only alternative. Fortunately, the stores afterwards found at Barberton overcame these awkward difficulties.

On Sunday, September 9th, the column began its march.[1] The route lay east along the Buffelspruit by

[1] The following was the composition and organisation of the Barberton column operating under General French:

Divisional Staff. A.D.C., Captain Sir J. Milbanke, V.C. A.D.C., Captain B. R. FitzGerald. Lieutenant Abadie, (galloper). Captain Barry, signalling officer). C.S.O., Lieutenant-Colonel D. Haig. D.A.A.G. (*a*), Major Hon. C. Bingham. D.A.A.G. (*a*), Major A. G. Hunter Weston. D.A.A.G. (*b*), Major Foster. D.A.A.G. for Intelligence, Captain J. Vaughan. C.R.A., Colonel Eustace. P.M.O., Lieutenant-Colonel Donovan. M.O. Captain Buist. A.P.M., Captain Beech. S.V.O., Captain Blenkinsop, D.S.O.

Division Troops. French's Scouts: O.C., Captain H. Bettelheim. Natal Field Force Detachment, with escort of Royal Highlanders: Captain Hearcroft, R.N.

1st Cavalry Brigade. General Gordon: A.D.C., Captain Wormald; Brigade-Major, Captain Butler. 6th Dragoon Guards, 2nd Dragoons, 6th Dragoons, T. Battery Royal Horse-Artillery, C. and F. Sections pom-pom, Section 1 Field Troop Royal Engineers.

4th Cavalry Brigade. General Dickson, C.B.: A.D.C., Captain Gage; Brigade-Major, Captain Kenna, V.C. 7th Dragoon Guards, 8th Hussars, 14th Hussars, O. Battery Royal Horse-Artillery (four guns) Section Pom-pom, Section 1 Field Troop Royal Engineers.

Mahon's Brigade. General Mahon, D.S.O.: A.D.C., Prince Alex-

the Roodehoogte Pass to Silverkop, and thence, crossing the Komati River at Hlomohlom, on by Nelshoogte to Barberton. From Carolina to Noitgedacht farm a fair road for some 10 miles dips and rises over the open veldt. Then the character

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ander of Teck; Brigade-Major, Captain Ben Smythe. 18th Hussars (one squadron), Imperial Light Horse, Lumsden's Horse, New Zealand Mounted Rifles (three companies), Queensland Mounted Infantry and Bushmen, Imperial Yeomanry (one squadron), 3rd Mounted Infantry (three companies), M. Battery Royal Horse Artillery and two pom-poms, Yeomanry Field Hospital.

Infantry Brigade. Lieutenant-Colonel Spens: A.D.C., Captain Bryant; Brigade-Major, Captain Higginson. 2nd Shropshire Light Infantry 1st Suffolk Regiment, Section Battery Royal Horse-Artillery.

Marching Strength of 1st Cavalry Brigade.

	Officers.	Men.	Horses.	
Brigade Staff	5	31	19	
6th Dragoon Guards	17	303	267	1 Maxim.
2nd Dragoons	16	256	243	1 „
6th Dragoons	25	406	334	1 „
	63	996	863	
T. Battery	8	156	163	6 guns.
C. and F. Section Pom-pom	2	31	43	3 pom-poms.
Ammunition Column	1	37	10	
Field Hospital, No. 11	2	17	3	
9th Bearer Company	1	23	6	
Field Troop	2	51	48	
Supply Depôt	1	10	4	
„ Column	1	23	13	
Grand Total	81	1,344	1,153	

Marching Strength of 4th Cavalry Brigade.

	Officers.	Men.	Horses.	
Brigade Staff	6	38	40	
7th Dragoon Guards	18	211	169	1 Maxim.
8th Hussars	24	307	252	1 „
14th Hussars	18	324	255	1 „
	66	880	716	3 Maxims.
O. Battery	5	97	106	4 guns.
Pom-pom	1	10	21	1 pom-pom.
Field Troop Royal Engineers	1	20	22	
Ammunition Column	1	27	11	
Grand Total	74	1,034	876	

Naval Brigade. 9 officers, 81 men, 8 horses, one 4·7-in. gun.

changes; the gentle slopes break up into crevasses and spruits, and wide mountain groups spread out freely, much like the Sewaliks of the Himalayas. In the far distance against the sky stand sharply outlined the peaks of gigantic mountain ranges, the Alps of the De Kaap valley. Far away over the mountains lies Barberton, only attainable by precipitous roads, bridle-paths, and native tracks. Leaving the plain the road rises over slopes between the river beds of the Buffelspruit on the south and the Zeekoe to the north, the two streams running for some distance parallel to each other before converging, and across the Roodehoogte Pass the road continues to the drift of the Buffelspruit. Through the rich green turf of these slopes peeps the red line of road, for the Roodehoogte group is sandstone formation. Hill after hill rises

General Mahon's Brigade.

	Officers.	Men.	Horses.	
Brigade Staff	7	18	22	
18th Hussars	1	30	24	
Lumsden's Horse	6	50	51	
M. Battery Royal Horse Artillery	5	137	150	6 guns.
Imperial Light Horse	26	367	444	
3rd Mounted Infantry	8	71	114	
Imperial Yeomanry	8	48	71	
New Zealand Mounted Rifles	16	226	329	
Queensland Impl. Bushmen	4	45	67	
Queensland Mtd. Infantry	1	22	38	
3rd Corps Staff	2	8	21	
	84	1,022	1,331	
Ammunition Column	1	23	8	
T. Section Vickers-Maxim	1	16	21	2 Vickers-Maxims.
Imperial Yeomanry Bearer Company Hospital	5	64	14	
Supply Column	2	8	6	
New South Wales Bearer Company	1	11	15	
7th Company Army Service Corps	1	25	20	
Grand Total	95	1,169	1,415	

gradually higher and then falls steeply away to mount again towards the main feature of the range, the cone-shaped Roodehoogte summit, visible from afar. For the last two miles and a half the high ground between the two rivers takes the contour of a wide range with a long backbone stretching east and narrowing till at last wedged in by the converging course of the streams and their confluence beyond the pass. The southern side drops in abrupt terraces, broken by kloofs and water-courses, while the northern abuts on to the Zeekoe River, feathering out into the hills and high plateaus beyond. The road follows the spine of the ridge, and passing over the Roodehoogte summit by its southern shoulder slopes down to the Buffelspruit Drift. Roodehoogte Hill, the Boer's main position, is a natural fortress. Behind lay the summit, cut off from the rising ground of our advance by a deep hollow; along the outer fringe of the hollow the Boer sharpshooters were concealed under perfect cover; safe on their splendid vantage-ground, with an unceasing shower of bullets they swept the country leading down to the plain of Carolina. Death to any man who showed himself on the sky-line of those terraces!

The long column of troops and wagons moved swiftly on a wide front, unopposed for the first 12 miles. After crossing the Buffelspruit at Noitgedacht the ox-transport outspanned for four hours, and was passed by Spens's infantry column on the Roodehoogte and Silverkop road. The advanced patrols reported the enemy on the Roodehoogte hills, and on the hills east of Buffelspruit numbers of Boers could be clearly made out evidently moving east towards the Kopje Aleen ranges.

The squadron of the advanced guard occupied a hill

opposite the road on the north, thereby coming under a hot fire from the enemy below to the south-east. A section of the 66th battery of field-artillery at once hastened in support up the steep side of the hill, the latter part of the way dragging the guns on by hand into action from the top at a range of 1,800 yards. Elsewhere Gordon's brigade (with the 14th Hussars temporarily attached), with two sections of horse-artillery firing simultaneously from two positions to clear our right front, pushed south and drove back from 200 to 300 Boers holding the kloofs between the hill we had taken on the left of the road and the Buffelspruit. Leaving the remaining section of his horse-battery to fire on the enemy's first position, Gordon now dropped south, and gradually working the Boers out of the clefts in the broken ground, forced the passage across the Buffelspruit at two in the afternoon. He then moved on east and occupied the farm Jachtlust, which stands on high commanding ground, thus completely turning the Boers' south flank which had extended far to their left.

At about noon the enemy relinquished his first position and withdrew to his main stronghold at Roodehoogte. Mahon's guns and the Imperial Light Horse immediately hurried on to the vacated ground and opened fire on Roodehoogte. The Boers must be forced from their positions across the Roodehoogte pass before we could venture along the rising causeway; and Mahon's guns, supported by a section of the 66th field-battery, unlimbered astride of the main road and directed a heavy bombardment against the enemy's stronghold, till the mounted infantry, New Zealanders, Bushmen, and yeomanry on the left could push ahead to turn the Boer right.

Advancing in succession over two ridges with

intervening depressions, they secured a lodgment, where they found themselves in full view of the Boers' front, and instantly assailed by a storm of bullets at a range of only 1,500 yards. Dropping below the crest line they were able to avoid the bullets coming from that direction, but they remained exposed on their left, for across the Zeekoe River the Boer riflemen, from the mountains jutting at right angles down to the water, reached them with a heavy fire. An attempt was made to haul up a Vickers-Maxim, and a section of field-guns, but nothing could be effected amid the incessant rain of Mauser bullets.

An advance under the cross-fire could only be effected with serious risks, which Colonel Craddock in command reported to General Mahon, who in turn communicated with General French. French saw that a further advance was for the present impossible, but he attached importance to the position they had already gained, and ordered them to hold on to it unless the fire became too hot.

The disposition of Mahon's force had an important bearing on the development of General French's attack. From the ground they occupied they could hold the Boers across the river in check, while their rifle volleys, sweeping the crest of the main Boer position, forbad the enemy to show over the edge of the hollow. Not only did their fire paralyse any movement from the north and the other side of the Zeekoe River, but supported by the artillery, who were bombarding the main position for two hours, the infantry in part was able to advance unobserved. With Colonel Spens leading, the 1st battalion of Suffolks came on to the attack, supported by the Shropshires. It was fine to see the infantry advance, the line of men rising over the swelling curves, dipping away from view as

the ground sank before them, to come up again in clear brown outline, every detail visible from the British position. All the time our shells went whizzing by overhead, cracking up against the ramparts of the Boers' main defences, until, when the infantry had approached within 400 yards, the order came to cease fire, and then followed a brilliant bit of execution. Disappearing for a space down the last of the declivities, they suddenly came into sight again, with bayonets fixed, clambering briskly over the dead and broken ground, the resisting steepness of which seemed to refuse access to the enemy's strong place of hiding; but up and over it all they surged, and then gathering themselves for the final effort, with one rush they stormed the position. But the Boer, with his usual instinct for avoiding danger, during that brief pause in the fire while our men were struggling through the rough ground in the dip, had hurried off to his ponies, and was away and out of reach before the infantry could get within striking distance.

Mahon's guns had occupied Roodehoogte and were already firing upon the enemy as they scampered off in parties of 30 or 40 into the kloofs beyond, across the north-eastern slope of the hill towards the Zeekoe valley. Down the road the Imperial Light Horse followed in hot pursuit, and a running fight was kept up to within a mile of the drift across the Buffelspruit, close to the junction with the Zeekoe.

Our guns, in spite of their commanding position on Roodehoogte Hill, did but little execution; and fortunately for us, a 15-pounder Creusot, trained on the hill and the road leading over it from a position about 800 yards from Kershaw's store on the far side of the river, though firing with surprising accuracy at a range of 9000 yards, proved equally ineffective. The

artillery duel was maintained till half-past six, when darkness put an end to the action.

The enemy retired to Kopje Aleen, but at close of day still held the position near Kershaw's Store; whether he would move south to Lake Chrissie or dispute the Komati on the north-east remained uncertain.

General French arranged his bivouac so as to ensure it against a surprise, and extended his troops over a front of five miles. The infantry occupied two hills about one mile west of the drift near Kershaw's store across the road; the Imperial Light Horse were placed on the left bank of the Buffelspruit connecting with the right of the infantry, and the mounted infantry held Roodehoogte hill connecting with the infantry's left. Gordon's brigade was on the right bank of the Buffelspruit, about three miles south-west of the drift near Kershaw's. Dickson's brigade covered the rear of the transport which was parked on the west slope of Roodehoogte about two miles from the top. The supply wagons reached their respective regiments at nine in the evening, except Gordon's which could not cross the drift, and his men had to go without food that night.

The Boers were holding the pass, as we now know, to secure for President Steyn (who had joined General Botha at Nelspruit) a safe and open road of retreat to the south. For the Commandant-General at Nelspruit had telegraphed to the leader of the Ermelo commando: "Go to Roodehoogte and stop there, but have everything in readiness to clear at a moment's notice. See all orders given by President Steyn are carried out. You must help to keep the Roodehoogte Pass open until President Steyn arrives."

The advance to the Hlomohlom Drift was delayed

by the crossing of the Buffelspruit, and the column was only able, though unopposed, to cover 10 miles. Early on the morning of Monday, September 10th, the naval 4·7 was in position on the Roodehoogte hill to cover the crossing of the column, but the enemy was found to have withdrawn.[1]

Gordon's and Mahon's brigades passing near Kershaw's store kept south, parallel to the Buffelspruit, and headed for the Kopje Aleen, an isolated sugar-loaf hill overlooking a billowy stretch of ground, and by two in the afternoon they were in unresisted occupation of the position.

The only signs of the Boers were some small detachments moving up the Lekkerloop valley, and a commando of about 500 going east in the Komati valley, possibly with the intention of reaching the high veldt south at Lake Chrissie. The whole column moved after them in the same direction, and

[1] The passage of the spruit was effected in the following order:

1. Mahon's Brigade crossing at 6.30 with regimental wagons. 2. Details of Gordon's brigade with regimental supply wagons which had remained on left bank. 3. Spens's command with regimental baggage. 4. Ammunition column. 5. Supply column. 6. Ox supply and ammunition park. 7. Dickson's regimental baggage. The whole was followed by Dickson's brigade (less one regiment) as rear-guard.

The length of the several units of the column and the time taken by each to pass a given point, are shown by the following table, which does not include the cavalry who are generally extended towards the front or flanks:

Gordon's regimental baggage	30 minutes	1½	miles (about
Mahon's " "	30 "	1½	"
Spen's fighting line	15 "	½	"
Naval gun and wagons	15 "	½	"
Spen's regimental baggage	25 "	1	"
Ox park	2 hours	4	"
Ammunition column (mule)	30 minutes	1	"
Supply " "	45 "	2	"
Dickson's Brigade, regimtal. transport	20 "	1	"
Total	5½ hours	13	miles.

bivouacked, with the addition of the ox-transport arrived at midnight, in the neighbourhood of Mount Ida, along the spruit which runs north into the Buffelspruit.

The march was resumed next morning, September 11th, by Gordon's, Mahon's, and Spens's commands, followed by the ox-train, and the ammunition and supply columns, with Dickson's brigade as rear-guard.

The road winds north-east by Kopje Aleen, and then sinks into the Bloemspruit valley, which on the north side is very mountainous. The crossing of the spruit was carried out with much difficulty. The bed, covered with some three feet of water, was obstructed with a quantity of big loose boulders, and the ascent up the north bank was steep and long; the road then rises through heavy sand and abrupt, rough places, crosses a plateau, and drops to the Hhomohlom Drift over the Komati River.

The cavalry reached the Bloemspruit Drift after a nine miles' march at half-past eight, and unsaddled for an hour to enable reconnaissances to be made to the Komati River and across. The general advance was pushed forward another seven miles.

The Komati River at the crossing of Hhomohlom Drift is like a Scotch salmon-river, some fifty to sixty yards wide, two to three feet deep, with little tides of water eddying or rushing by, and trees growing to the banks' edges. Here was the appointed place for the night's bivouacs, and late in the evening, after eleven, Dickson's brigade came up and covered them along the southern side of the drift. Gordon's and Mahon's brigades halted three miles north, with outposts as far as Vaalkop.

One of Mahon's squadrons was sent out on reconnaissance towards Nelshoogte, along the northern bank

of the stream which flows into the Glade River. Occupying a hill, they were endeavouring to establish heliographic communication with Hutton, whose force was supposed to be moving north towards the Devil's Kantoor, when suddenly, from the distant peaks pointing like needles high up into the sky, sparkled out a brilliant silvery light; Hutton had opened communication with us from Mooifontein, north-west of Tafelberg.

From their hill Mahon's brigade could see the enemy very active on a road which apparently branched towards Nelshoogte. The patrols out in that direction only met small detachments of Boers, who retired before them; but reconnoitring towards the Nelshoogte Pass, across the new Natal road leading to Barberton, they discovered the enemy posted in strength.

The bold project now occurred to French of opening communications with Barberton by forcing the passage of the pass, and with a daring that was almost recklessness he decided on a manœuvre which would take the cavalry and a hundred of Mahon's mounted men over heights well-nigh inaccessible and along narrow ledges, with a steep fall into the valleys far below. Such an operation called for the nerve of experienced mountaineers in man and beast alike; but the General knew his men, and felt assured and confident.

Keeping as much as possible in concealment, the cavalry were to work round eastward and turn the enemy's left flank, the infantry, artillery, and Mahon's force meanwhile threatening the enemy's front and right. Mahon was to send a strong squadron north to demonstrate towards Tafelkop and Mooifontein so as to mislead the Boers into believing that they would be attacked from the south-west. His brigade (less

one squadron and 100 New Zealand Mounted Infantry) was to advance along the north side of the Natal-Barberton road, the infantry and naval gun on the south, the transport and Dickson's brigade remaining halted till further orders. The respective starts were made at half-past six and nine in the morning. As a precautionary measure troops and horses were put on two-thirds rations, which would prolong the duration of supplies till Sunday, September 6th. Gordon's brigade, consisting of the Scots Greys, Carabiniers, Inniskillings, 14th Hussars, 100 New Zealand Mounted Infantry, T. battery of horse-artillery, and one pom-pom, marched at three in the morning.

The line of outposts held by the Boers decided Gordon to get his brigade under the base of the hills before dawn. The fires were left burning in camp and the wagons remained outspanned. Quietly the troops moved off, and crossing the Glade River in the dark, the whole of the brigade was massed at the foot of the mountains ready to resume their march in the half dark of dawn.

The Inniskillings occupied a hill to cover the remainder of the force, which moved east along the southern fringe of an extended chain of mountains, crossing several ravines and rocky beds in their advance. It was soon evident that the Boers contemplated no intruders on their mountain seclusion. At six in the morning they were preparing breakfast in their laager without a suspicion of danger, when suddenly they saw our cavalry close upon them. Empty-handed, without giving a thought to their belongings, they scattered in hasty flight. The brigade at once followed, the Inniskillings on the left, the main body in the centre, and the 14th Hussars on the right,

and heading north-east approached the Nelshoogte heights from the south, on the further or northern slope of which the road winds up to the pass.

This road, a very fine one, crosses the Glade River and keeps along a flat tableland till, on approaching the Nelshoogte Pass, it enters a valley that runs from east to west and steepens abruptly. Cut out of the rocky slopes of a long ridge, it skirts the northern side of the valley, keeping for the most part alongside of the turbulent mountain stream which falls from its source in the Nelshoogte, but sometimes branching away to a height of from 50 to 80 feet above. The long southern ridge has three rocky prominences, thick with bush and trees, on its extreme east, the highest in the centre. On the opposite side the heights descend sharply down to the river, the craggy peaks which break away from the northern chain narrowing the valley towards the pass and commanding the road at almost all points. The Boers were in strong possession of the gates of entry and exit to the pass. Beyond this gap in the range the high plateau spreads out for five miles or more, and the road cuts across till it comes in sight of Barberton far below in the hollow, at which point the road drops abruptly down into the De Kaap valley.

By half-past seven Gordon's patrols were seen on the ridges leading up to the western end of the pass, and soon after a squadron of the Inniskillings (employed as divisional cavalry with the infantry) had occupied the end of the ridge commanding the pass from the south. The advance of Gordon's small force was impeded by great physical difficulties, but the men in their zeal succeeded in dragging up by hand two horse-artillery guns and a pom-pom over ground that looked abso-

lutely impossible. It was no country for a horse, and for the most part the men had to lead their animals in single file, picking their way along sheer and broken ground. The only opposition Gordon had so far met with was from patrols, but the moment his advanced guards were discovered a hot fusilade was directed on them from the bushy ridge commanding the pass from the south and also from the ridge on the opposite side, which were both found to be strongly held.

The rest of French's force had in the meantime made considerable headway. The infantry and the naval gun moving north-east crossed by a good drift over the Glade River, and reaching a commanding hill one mile to the east, which commanded the country for miles, the gun was unlimbered and brought into position, but was soon after shifted further forward. On this hill French took up his position, and was thus in heliographic communication with all the units of his command. A reconnoitring squadron of Mahon's, out before daylight in the direction of Belmont, having reported the mountain to the north-west of the pass clear of the enemy, the remainder of his brigade was ordered to come on.

By nine the infantry had reached the west end of the pass that the cavalry had made good, and a section of the 66th battery of field-artillery opened fire on the wooded summit of the southern ridge. The Shropshires, supported by the Suffolks, were brought up and pushed along the northern slopes of the ridge in extended order till the enemy were gradually forced backwards.

By this time Gordon had reached such a forward position that he was able to compel the enemy to relinquish whatever hold they still had on the ridge

that flanks the pass at its southern end. His guns commanded a field of fire along the crest-line, while part of his brigade dismounted, pushed along the southern slope and completely turned the enemy's left, driving them from the wooded summit of the ridge. Closely following, his guns fired over the shoulder of the summit across to the headland north, and then the infantry advance was pressed home. They swept up the steep ascent, triumphantly seized the head of the pass, and a few minutes before noon had crowned it in full possession.

Close behind them the 66th battery laboured painfully along, each gun dragged by 16 horses, up the topmost rise of 500 feet, and over the last 800 yards of roadway. By noon they had arrived, and at once opened fire from the height on the retreating enemy.

The Imperial Light Horse, assisted at this juncture by artillery fire operating from the north-west, pushed back the retreating Boers towards Moodies along the Steynsdorp track, causing them to abandon seven wagons loaded with supplies. The infantry also followed up in hot pursuit, two companies pushing forward to a hill which commands the track along which the wagons were making.

On Gordon's left the Inniskillings had made a great effort to reach the top of the pass by the slope of the south headland, and succeeded after a stern climb and with infinite difficulty. But so steep and inaccessible was the way that it was found expedient for the rest of his brigade with the guns to retrace their steps to the Glade River whence they had started in the morning, and follow the road leading to the pass.

Directly French was satisfied that our troops had gained a firm footing on the western end of the pass and would be able to shift the Boers from

their defensive positions, he issued orders for the transport column and rearguard brigade, halted at Hhlomohlom, to follow along the road.

The rear had crossed the drift near the store after nightfall, the whole column was parked near the foot of the pass, and the naval gun, which stood unlimbered on the hill north of the store and had not come into action, was in readiness for the ascent, But short as the ascent was it was so abrupt and rugged that each wagon required three teams to pull it along; and strive and strain as they might it was three days (from Thursday, September 12th to Saturday the 14th) before the last wagon was up the pass.

By a bold and brilliant movement the position, 5,500 feet above the sea-level and of the utmost strategical importance, was gained, and French was able to bivouac there for the night.

Two companies of Spens's force held the advanced hill taken in the afternoon, and the remainder of his command (some companies assisting the transport column excepted), spread out along the river-bed, east of the northern end of the pass on Morgenzon farm. Mahon's force was distributed with the Imperial Light Horse on the hills north-east of the pass, and his mounted infantry along the front of the pass holding the hills north of the road to protect the bivouacs and the transport column from that side. Of Gordon's brigade the Inniskillings were on the summit of the pass, holding the southern ridge, while the rest bivouacked at the foot.

The march was a very trying one for the horses, 161 being lost out of Mahon's brigade alone.

General French's next move was also to be in the nature of a surprise. The main body was to stand fast to hold the pass for the ascent of the transport,

while Gordon's brigade was to be sent by a short cut of 15 miles due east on a wearisome march over the mountains with two days' rations in their saddles.

By sunset the brigade had worked its way back to the foot of the Nelshoogte Pass, where they were to bivouac for the night. The men were in even worse plight than the horses, as for the most of the day they had been plodding on foot over rough and broken ground, and uncommonly glad they were to find that they were not to march again till three the next morning, instead of at half-past eight that evening as had been originally ordered. Long before that hour guns and ammunition-wagons, with double and treble teams, were being slowly hauled up the terrible two miles to the top of the pass. Day was breaking as the summit was reached, and the mist clouds rolling slowly away revealed an expanse of what looked like open undulating country, oval in shape, some thirty miles broad by fifty long, and surrounded by mountains as high and formidable as those that they had just surmounted. But in reality this fair-seeming country was broken up by rocky ridges, dongas, and spruits, as bad as any in the Transvaal, to within three or four miles of Barberton, which, at that moment hidden in the mist, lay at the foot of the mountains on the farther side. By six o'clock the entire brigade, wagons and all, were at the top of the pass, and, French having joined them there with his Staff, the descent was begun.

Gordon's guns, escorted by the Inniskillings, were to follow the road which, passing by Zwartkop and Tafelkop, leads east by the Chute into Barberton, a distance of 30 miles from Nelshoogte as against 15 by the bridle-path. Leaving Nelshoogte the descent into the valley is by four miles of sharp descending curves, the gradient greater in places than at any point from

the Komati River to the summit of the pass. The road, which follows the line of water-courses, was very bad with loose blocks of stone of all sizes, and a long and difficult job it was getting the convoys over it; at the Chute it dips so sharply that it is necessary to lock the wheels of the wagons, while the teams have to be most carefully handled.

General French had kept his plans very secret, and it was a surprise to everybody when, after following this road for some two or three miles, he turned off south, taking the remainder of Gordon's brigade over smooth grassy land such as they had not seen for many a week. In a few minutes there was a halt in front; the enemy at last, thought our men, but nothing woke the stillness save the munching of the horses as they cropped the sweet grass, and it soon became evident that the halt had been called to enable the brigade to move on in single file down a track that could only by courtesy be called a bridle-path. Eastward past the Devil's Knuckles, part of the Tafelkop group, an outcrop of rugged rock several hundred of feet high, with a sharp fall of 1,000 feet and more to the De Kaap valley, the men made their way on foot for some seven or eight miles, pulling their horses after them, now on their haunches and now almost on their heads, down a path sometimes winding round the nearly precipitous face of a hill and then crossing a deep donga, all the time going roughly parallel to a mountain-torrent which ran into a more important stream in the plain some 5,000 feet below. It would be three good hours before ground could be reached on which it would be possible to show any front to an enemy; here, for the present, were 700 or 800 dismounted troopers strung out on a line probably extending more than three miles from front to rear,

and completely at the mercy of 50 good men, or even half that number, posted on any one of the positions commanding the track from the other side of the stream. It needed a man of iron nerve to order half his fighting force to face so grave a risk; but "French's luck," which had come to be firmly believed in by the whole division, stood by his men, and they reached the open ground without a shot having been fired or a Boer seen.

Barberton, once the greatest gold-mining centre in South Africa, was still 12 good miles distant, and it seemed hardly possible that the enemy would surrender a place of such importance without at least one effort at defence, especially as the intervening country was so admirably suited to his tactics. It was already ten o'clock; the sun was high in the heavens, and the heat in the semi-tropical climate of the valley almost overpowering. The road lay across Queen's River and its tributaries to Concession Creek Drift, and men and horses were slaking their thirst in the stream when Gordon rode up in a hurry to Scobell. "Take 100 men of the Greys," he cried, "and ride straight on Barberton as fast as you can; cut the railway-line north of the town, and if you are quick you will capture a Long Tom which I have just heard is in the station." Off set Scobell at once with about 60 men, all he was able to get together from the advanced squadron. Captain Lawson rode a few hundred yards ahead to scout, but there was little time for scouting; each man had that Long Tom in his mind and made his way as best he could without a thought of what might be waiting for him behind the next ridge.

At last the open country was reached and the white Oriental-looking houses of Barberton became plainly

visible four miles away. The little party was now able to trot along briskly in more soldierly array, when a scout came galloping back, his face blazing with excitement. "There's two big wagons," he shouted, "going like hell with a lot of Boers riding alongside 'em just about a mile beyond the next rise. There should be something good in 'em from the way those niggers are using their whips." True enough, the wagons were there and about 25 Boers in charge. A shallow donga ran parallel to the direction in which they were going, and some 2,000 yards further on was a well defined rocky ridge over which the escort galloped as Scobell and his party came in sight and opened fire on them. An ox in each team fell, and the drivers made off as fast as they could.

Time pressed for getting at the railway, and yet these Boers could not be left in their position, as it was the only place for some distance round where a stand could be made against a superior force of the enemy, which might be expected at any moment from the town now only two miles off. As no sign came from the ridge, some of the party, leaving the shelter of the donga, rode towards it to be greeted by a storm of bullets which sent them scampering back much faster than they went, with, however, only one man and two horses slightly wounded. As a frontal attack was impossible and the railway must be cut, Scobell sent Maud with 20 men to take the ridge in the rear, while Lawson with 10 others was to make for a kopje overlooking the town between their present position and the spot where the line was to be cut; Tristram with 15 men was to creep up as much under cover as he could to the wagons, while Scobell himself galloped off to the railway with Campbell of the 16th Lancers, five men, and a farrier-corporal of the 1st Life Guards,

who was to manage the job with his tools supplemented by a pickaxe taken from a farmhouse. In less than 20 minutes the farrier was at work, and everybody was heaving and pulling and hammering under his direction. The sweat poured off them in streams, but never an inch would that rail budge, though shots began to be heard from both Maud's and Lawson's positions, and any moment they felt they might have to mount and be off.

Suddenly, on the main road from Barberton, 1,000 yards distant and separated from them by a wide and deep donga, appeared a Cape-cart drawn by four mules at top speed and escorted by a few mounted Boers and a man on a bicycle. "That chap's in a deuce of a hurry," said Campbell; "I think we ought to stop him;" and away he ran with a couple of men to the edge of the donga and opened fire on the travellers. The escort sheered off at once, and the cart, pulling up, was found to contain the landrost of Vryheid, his secretary and telegraph-clerk. The landrost took Scobell aside and confided to him that he had in his possession a large sum of money belonging to the Transvaal Government and also some valuable papers. Scobell promised to take the greatest care of both; but as the bag of money was too heavy to carry off in a hurry, and some 60 Boers were reported to be approaching from the west, he hid the bag for the present in the donga, and returned to the farrier, who had meanwhile managed to loosen a rail sufficiently to stop the passage of any train.

It was now about two o'clock. Major Middleton had brought his squadron up to Scobell's support, and was in position on the ridge which the Boers had evacuated when they found Maud working round to their rear. Barberton was in full view. There was

much movement in the town, and a constant stream of men could be seen leading their horses by a steep path up the mountains behind it. Luckily they had not in their hurry chosen the easiest and most obvious means of escape, or it might have fared badly with Scobell's little force whose weakness they could hardly have failed to discover.

The wagons proved a prize worth fighting for, containing several hundreds of rifles and thousands of rounds of ammunition, besides clothes, tobacco, matches, sugar and coffee.

A dash on the town was the next move in Scobell's mind, when out came the chief inhabitant, Van der Post, calling himself the civil and military representative of the Transvaal Government, to meet General French as he crossed Concession Creek Drift at the head of his cavalry and took possession of the town without opposition.

Though the big gun, which had been removed two days previously, had escaped them, the little band which rode into Barberton after dusk that evening had done their work right well. They carried with them a bag containing £3,000 in gold and £11,000 in notes besides the two wagon-loads aforesaid; and in the station they made prize of 44 engines and rolling-stock to the value of several hundred thousand pounds.

General French's arrival, though in some measure anticipated, came practically as a surprise. It had never occurred to the Boers that he would take the hazardous bridle-path, and expecting him along the main road, they had timed his entry for Sunday. A commando 600 strong was thus still in the town when the approach of our advanced patrols was reported, and only just found time to escape, by train or on horseback, in the direction of Kaapmuiden.

The British prisoners were at once released,—23 officers and 59 non-commissioned officers—with many Boers who had been imprisoned for taking the oath of neutrality. Among them was Commandant Schoeman, who had professed his earnest desire to use his influence to terminate the war, when he had met French in Pretoria after their encounter at Colesberg. The poor man had suffered hardly. Having surrendered he was treated with severity and suspicion by his own people, and in addition to it all came the news that our soldiers had, by a mistake, destroyed his farm.

Besides its inhabitants the town was full of refugee families, 2,500 women and children in all. Luckily for us there was an ample supply of provisions for everybody.

To put down the sniping, which had given the troops much annoyance during their advance on Barberton, and was still kept up after their entry into the town, General French issued the following warning: "This is to give notice that if any shooting into the town, or sniping in its vicinity takes place, the Lieut.-General Commanding will withdraw the troops and shell the town without further notice." This was enough, though a number of Boers remained on the hills above the town, of whom some were captured and others surrendered.

The Scots Greys bivouacked on the outskirts of the town, the Carabiniers on Queen's River, and the Inniskillings and 14th Hussars on Concession Creek, thus overcoming the water difficulty, as the town supply is scanty. T. battery halted seven miles from the town and came in the next morning.

General French informed Lord Roberts through Hutton at Kaapsche Hoop, of his capture of

Barberton, and explained that his main force was still 35 miles behind, detained at Nelshoogte by difficulties of transport. They were pushing on as fast as possible, but he could expect no arrivals for at least two days. The enemy, about 1,500 strong, was reported to have retired into the country south-east of Barberton, only getting away their guns and wagons with great difficulty over very rough ground. The one good egress was barred by the Nelshoogte positions which French had decided to hold. He believed that the Boers did not wish to fight, being sorely intent on getting back to their own country; but for this consideration, and the question of holding Barberton, he was ready for any further advance the Commander-in-Chief might design on Komati Poort.

On Friday the 14th a message arrived from Lord Roberts warmly congratulating French and his troops on their success; and on the following day, amid a scene of great enthusiasm, the Union Jack was hoisted at the landrost's office, and three hearty cheers raised for Her Majesty the Queen.

Dickson's brigade was now directed to relieve Mahon on Nelshoogte Pass, the latter being required at Barberton for reconnaissance duty. Nelshoogte, where so many roads from the railways of the north concentrate, was in French's opinion strategically so important that he recommended holding it, and suggested that Hutton should move down from the Kaapsche Hoop for that purpose. But apparently Lord Roberts preferred to await the result of a reconnaissance which French was to make south-east to ascertain the movements of Christian Botha and those commandos which had withdrawn from Barberton on our approach. Colonel Hamilton with the 14th Hussars was detailed for this task. Following the Steynsdorp road

he came to Montrose, where he ascertained that the commandos had avoided Nelshoogte Pass by cutting a new road down the Buck Reef, along which they retired on Steynsdorp, leaving only a few scouts behind in the Moodie hills. This part of the country found to be clear, the retention of the pass was no longer considered essential to the situation.

In view of the early movement contemplated on Kaapmuiden and Komati Poort, French considered one battalion and two guns sufficient to garrison Barberton, intending to concentrate all his troops between that place and Avoca station.

The Inniskillings, under Major Allenby, were sent to the Sheba mine, on the report that much was to be picked up there. His position would cover the line, and would also be in the direction of further advance. The Mine and Eureka City were occupied without opposition. Allenby found the road from Barberton to Eureka City, which is cut out of the side of the mountain, to be a mere miner's track, in places very jagged and steep, but he succeeded in dragging a pom-pom up to the top of the hill, though his wagons could not face it. A few days later he made a successful raid as far as Avoca station, 18 miles from Barberton, capturing six engines; but he found the bridge destroyed, which made it necessary to use ox convoys between that point and the Delagoa Bay railway until the repair was completed.

About the same time the Imperial Light Horse were sent on an expedition past Avoca up a stiff mountain road to the French Bob mine, 36 miles from Barberton. Towards the mine 100 Boers with 60 wagons were moving with the intent to secure an exit south towards Piggs Peak, in Swazieland, that should take them on to the high veldt. They were

reported to be stuck fast in the ascent, but by the time our men had come up, the Boers had surmounted their difficulties and were gone. All we effected was the capture of 20 prisoners, a number of rifles, and the burning of some wagons and ammunition. That same day, September 20th, the remainder of French's force, the Shropshires, under Spens (the Suffolks having been previously withdrawn to garrison Kaapmuiden), Dickson's brigade and O. battery with the naval gun arrived from Nelshoogte.

And now the main advance was again in progress. Pole-Carew with the 11th division from Godwaan station had reached Kaapsche Hoop on September 16th followed by Ian Hamilton on September 19th. Both generals came on to Barberton and arranged with French that their forces should be temporarily provisioned from his local supplies, one week's supplies for 5000 men going to each division.

All the information gathered from reconnaisances, prisoners, and spies regarding the situation east went to show that the Boer commandos were retiring from the south of the railway to the high veldt; that the defence of Komati Poort was left by Louis Botha and Schalk Burger to dismounted men only, to hold or abandon it as they pleased, that the big guns were all to be thrown into the Komati River, and that the troops gathered round the Poort and flocking into Portuguese territory were disorganised and irresolute.

Pole-Carew and Hamilton intended pushing on to Komati Poort as rapidly as possible to rescue the large quantity of rolling-stock close to the line. In this movement French was to have no part, owing to the nature of the country and the prevalence of horse-sickness. Instead, he received directions to work

back south to Steynsdorp, near the Swazieland border, then west by Ermelo and Bethal to clear up the country in those parts. But his transport was in a very bad way, worn out by reduced rations and irregular supplies, his horses tender-footed after all the rough work they had just gone through; and considering what great difficulties must be encountered in the route to Steynsdorp, the possibility of the transport repeating their late marching experiences, unless first restored to condition, was more than doubtful. The Belfast route was therefore decided upon, which would, by a wide detour to south and west, touch those points and districts that required searching out.

The heat was now growing intense in the close Barberton valley; and considerable relief was felt when news came that French's force might march before the return of the troops from Komati Poort, leaving behind only an infantry garrison of 300 men. It was arranged that Brabant's Horse and the Imperial Light Horse should entrain from Machadodorp for Pretoria, leaving their horses behind for French to make his selection from among them. The Imperial Light Horse left on Saturday, September 29th, marching to Machadodorp, their strength being 26 officers and 241 mounted men. The force to remain at Barberton under Colonel Spens's command numbered about 900 infantry, 250 mounted infantry, and two field-guns. The force French was to take with him consisted of one half of Mahon's brigade, two cavalry brigades, half a battalion of the Suffolks, and a naval gun. He proposed to move by the direct road over Kaapsche Hoop to Godwaan station, and thence follow the railway-line to Machadodorp. The date of march was fixed for October 13th.

Preparatory to the advance a detachment of five companies of the Suffolks with Royal Engineers and French's Scouts were sent to the Hoop to make good the road up the pass.

II.

Barberton to Pretoria.

The march to Barberton and nearly three weeks of excessive heat in the De Kaap valley were lesser trials to General French and his men than their journey back to Pretoria. The whole month from October 3rd, when they left Barberton, to November 3rd, the day of their arrival in Pretoria, was one long-drawn physical and mental strain, and gave another signal illustration of the patience and fortitude of our men both British and Colonial. The stupendous climb up the unbending heights of the Kaapsche Hoop, the violence of the elements, overpowering heat alternating with terrific thunderstorms, struck hard at our soldiers and laid low many who had not flinched before the severities of war. The heavy roads and the steep gradients, slippery as Alpine icefields, called for excessive effort in hauling the wagons up the Kaapsche Hoop and on to the Waterval Onder high-road. From dawn to dark the enemy hung on our flanks and rear, constantly harassing us, always to be seen on every sky-line left by our advancing troops. For nights together the whole fighting-force was on outpost duty, the horses under saddle day and night, and the men practically without rest; and all the time drenching rains and angry thunderstorms, no shelter, and scarcely a camp-fire possible. In such wretched

circumstances well might General French speak words of appreciation and encouragement to his troops as he rode round to address the different corps after divine service at Bethal on the 21st, and well merited came the Commander-in-Chief's kindly message from Pretoria congratulating them on their successful march in the teeth of all the opposition they had encountered. The following narrative supplies the details which have here been given only in outline.

It was calculated that crossing the pass must take two days at least, and on October 2nd the transport, escorted by two squadrons of cavalry, was sent on, one day ahead of the division, along the main road to the Kaapsche Hoop. The overpowering heat was now ended; a strong wind had sprung up the evening before, continuing all night, and when the march began the thermometer registered a difference of 45° in the temperature. But worse than the heat was the destroying rage of the thunderstorm, that broke in awful violence over the valley at eight on the morning of the 2nd, and all the night through the rain fell in torrents, impeding the progress of our weak ill-fed teams.

The next morning, October 3rd, dawned cold and windy. Gordon's brigade marched at nine and Dickson's, with Mahon's guns attached, at eight by the Devil's Kantoor road. Spens remained in command at Barberton with 300 New Zealanders and the Shropshires, while a half-battalion was left at Avoca to guard the bridges and the line between that place and Barberton. The remainder of Mahon's brigade, including the Imperial Light Horse, was already on its way to Pretoria.

General French and his Staff rode out of Barberton at eleven. Rain was still falling heavily making grievous havoc of the roads, and thunderstorms, which

are the terror of these regions, continued with fatal effect. Along the Kantoor road one lightning flash killed a sergeant and a man of the ammunition column 40 yards apart, as well as two horses and six mules all in different teams. The transport animals suffered sorely from the roads and drifts, many wagons only getting in after midnight. The convoy alone lost 200 oxen between Avoca station and Kaapsche Hoop, and the column sent off the previous day had failed to make its way up the pass.

At about six in the evening the rain ceased, the clouds divided, and the night grew fine and clear. The ascent of the Devil's Kantoor, or Kaapsche Hoop, is 12 miles long, with several steep grips, the last six miles being especially precipitous. Formerly the coach from Barberton to Pretoria travelled this way, but since the completion of the railway the road from long neglect was so out of repair, that in such bad weather it was a tough job to get even an empty wagon along.

The Kaapsche Hoop proper is a broad flat plateau some 3000 feet above the De Kaap valley, into which its sides slope abruptly and sometimes in a sheer descent. The road, hewn out of the cliff side, mounts in steep zig-zags, in all a distance of four miles and a half from Red Hill to the top. The ascent of the more difficult parts was to be made in stages and divided into two sections, the first section, from the foot of Red Hill to the first plateau, being two miles; and treble teams of mules were required to pull the wagons thus far, the ground being too slippery for the use of oxen that day. The other section was the last mile up to the top, and every whit as difficult. In a few cases 46 mules were inspanned to less than half a load (1500 to 1800

pounds); but the poor animals were mostly unfit for such hard work, as they had been perforce left to their scanty grazing while the horses were given what mealies were to be found in Barberton.

The getting the wagons up the pass began at daylight and continued on through most of the night. By nightfall the 1st brigade and about half of the transport only were at Kaapsche Hoop; dragging the battery of horse-artillery from Red Hill to the top of the pass took four hours and a half. The 4th brigade bivouacked at the foot of Red Hill. The ox convoy with supplies from Avoca worked as far as Rietspruit, but did not reach the top of the pass till the night of Saturday, October 6th. The hauling up of the wagons went on all day, and by night the 1st and 4th brigades with their wagons were at Kaapsche Hoop. At five in the evening the head of the extra ox transport began the ascent from the foot of the Red Hill, struggled along through the night, and finally reached the summit at the close of the next day.

The downward road towards Godwaan is well engineered,—at its best by Waterval Onder, some awkward drifts with stiff banks excepted; but the heavy rain had spoiled the good portions, and made all bad alike. From Waterval Onder the road winds up a steep hill with sharp gradients, but, on the whole, the wagons, travelling light, had not much difficulty in reaching Machadodorp.

Meantime, the five companies of Suffolks and Sappers had again been despatched ahead road-mending, thus facilitating the march of the 1st and 4th brigades, who reached Machadodorp on the 8th, when the reorganisation and refitting of the column was immediately proceeded with.

Should he leave Machadodorp on the 12th, General French hoped to reach Carolina on the 14th, Ermelo on the 18th, and Bethal on the 20th; and, indeed, though he left a day late, and met with constant and determined opposition, he succeeded in arriving at Bethal on the date fixed. He had relied on securing good remounts for all his men, but, unfortunately, few were available, and his brigades were obliged to turn out weak as they were. The task before him was to thoroughly clear the country from the enemy who was known to be scattered over the whole district between Pretoria and Standerton. Buller's force had already worked through that way, but there was trouble again, too serious to go unchecked. Owing to the difficulty of communication, a long supply column for a fortnight's rations was necessary, making 150 ox-wagons, covering a line of road four-and-a-half miles long, and absorbing strong escorts for the protection of rear and flank. Feeling that his force was insufficient for the wide front it was essential to take up for such an undertaking, French keenly urged permission for the reinforcement of three squadrons of Brocklehurst's cavalry due to arrive from Buller's northern march, and with them Strathcona's Horse; but neither being available, he had to make the best of the small force at his disposal. He divided it into three sections under three separate commands.

General Mahon's Brigade. 8th Hussars, 316 men, 334 horses; 14th Hussars, 304 men, 309 horses. Total, 620 men, 643 horses. M. Battery Royal Horse Artillery, 130 men, 142 horses, 6 guns. F Section Pom-pom, 14 men, 12 horses, 2 guns.

General Gordon's Brigade. Carabiniers, 294 men (including officers' servants, &c.), 327 horses; Scots Greys, 407 men, 425 horses; Inniskillings, 257 men, 274 horses. Total, 958 men, 1,026 horses. T. Battery Royal Horse Artillery.

General Dickson's Brigade. 7th Dragoon Guards, O. Battery Royal Horse Artillery, Battalion of Suffolks (less four companies), Lumsden's

Horse, Detachment of 20 Imperial Guides and 120 mounted Kaffirs (from Buller's force), the latter being employed to lead reserve horses.

Reports located 200 of the enemy at Bonnefoi on the Komati River, another detachment at Carolina, and 800 under Tobias Smuts at Lake Chrissie, south-east of Carolina.

General French's plan provided for an advance on Ermelo by two columns moving independently, yet in touch with each other, joining hands again at that place. Mahon was to move south-west to Twyfelaar, on the Komati (north-west of Carolina) well on French's right flank, Gordon on the left, by Bonnefoi on Carolina. Both parties were to start simultaneously from either point on October 15th, marching on a wide front, with their dates arranged to ensure them reaching Ermelo on October 18th. Dickson was to follow straight to Carolina as a reserve, and to escort the supply train. Mahon was to leave on Friday the 12th, Gordon and Dickson on the day after.

Mahon marched at seven in the morning for Geluk, where Buller and French had met with opposition on their march up to Machadodorp. The men looked very fit and cheerful as they moved out, and their horses in hard condition. Most of the remounts served out for the new march were Colonial-bred, and though small, they had plenty of muscle and looked thoroughly serviceable; and, indeed, it was considered that these little animals had done better than other remounts on the long and weary marches.

Later in the afternoon Colonel Lowe, with the 7th Dragoon Guards (301 men, 311 horses) and a pom-pom, marched 10 miles south to Zevenfontein and Elandsfontein, to hold the ridges which command the road leading to Komati bridge. Before daybreak

next morning Gordon's brigade left Machadodorp, followed at six by Dickson's with the transport. Scarcely had they gone four miles when a message arrived from Mahon, saying that the enemy had attacked him from three sides and with three guns, and being in superior force, that he was retiring slowly on Belfast. Mahon's retirement, which exposed Gordon's right, made it necessary for French to check the whole movement till the pressure had been taken off. Gordon was ordered to do no more than secure the passage across the Komati, reconnoitre well to westward, and watch his right rear. Lowe received orders to push two squadrons and a pom-pom west on Komati River and protect the right flank of the baggage column. At Welgelegen French received a further message from Mahon to the effect that he was hard pressed, was retiring on Dalmanutha, and had asked for part of the garrison there to man the hills between the town and Waaikraal to protect his retiring convoys. Haig immediately rode across to Mahon to report on the situation, while French dashed off to Komati bridge to examine the state of affairs on Gordon's front.

By noon Haig was able to report Mahon in safety, and that the Boers had fallen back south-west to Van Wyksvlei. But the force had been severely engaged, and Mahon decided to bivouac on the hill he held, pushing out some squadrons west towards the Komati River that they might be ready to resume progress the next morning. It seems that before it was quite daylight the Boers had opened fire, with a long-range gun and two smaller pieces from a hill south-west of Geluk farm just above Van Wyksvlei, on Mahon's position, which was on the left bank of the Geluk stream, on a high ridge facing west. The moment the firing began

Mahon ordered his transport to fall back eastward. The enemy soon developed their attack, and stealthily creeping up the broken and rocky southern side of Mahon's ridge got within 40 yards of his troops and poured a hot fire into them, another body at the same time attacking his right. Mahon succeeded in holding his position till he considered his transport free of danger, and then fell back along the slope to a point further east. Gordon's advance south of the Komati was now well forward and in a position to make its presence felt, when the Boers withdrew their guns and retired gradually on Van Wyksvlei. Our casualties were heavy, three officers and six of other ranks killed, four officers and 25 of other ranks wounded.

The force which attacked Mahon consisted of the Ermelo and Carolina commandos, 1,100 strong with four guns. Their object was to make a dash on the railway and capture our supply trains. After retiring they split up into three columns, going south, south-east, and east.

Gordon's brigade, after crossing the Komati River, moved down south, and, meeting but slight opposition, occupied the ridge south-east of Bonnefoi store, 20 miles from Machadodorp, bivouacking there with outposts thrown out to within seven miles of Carolina; Dickson's brigade, with the ox train, came up and bivouacked close by, the troops covering the flanks of the convoy from the east, having been engaged with snipers all day.

A constant source of anxiety from the first day of the march to the last was the condition of the oxen. Hard work and want of good grazing had told upon them distressingly; incessantly labouring along heavy roads, sniped at and ill-fed, they succumbed daily in large numbers, and were left dead on the wayside.

French now decided to make a rapid march with Gordon's brigade by moonlight on Carolina, hoping both to make some prisoners and to clear the country for the rest of the column. Dickson was to follow as soon as possible with the supply column, trusting to Mahon to protect the right flank from attack. At three in the morning accordingly French, with Gordon and his brigade, set out, and at seven entered Carolina unopposed, finding a nearly deserted town. Being without news from Mahon, who was to have moved on Twyfelaar, French, shortly after noon, directed the Carabiniers with one pom-pom to go out and connect with him, if necessary, to assist his crossing of the Komati River and then to bivouac six miles west of Carolina.

Again checked in his advance and unable to make headway, Mahon reported that he was held up at Van Wyksvlei by some Boers still in position, and had been obliged to fall back on his bivouac of the previous night. This message made French reinforce the Carabiniers by one squadron and two guns, to march next morning to Komati River in support of Mahon. Informed of the situation, that only a rear-guard enemy was now blocking his path, Mahon was instructed to push on next morning to the river. The next day accordingly the Carabiniers and reinforcements moved on to the Komati River, met Mahon's force, which had got south unopposed, and reached Twyfelaar at noon.

Meanwhile, French, who had halted for the day at Carolina, reconnoitred the country south, an extensive open plain poorly supplied with water, and found that the enemy was breaking away towards the source of the Vaal River and south-east to Lake Chrissie, only small bodies remaining in the kloofs of the Komati valley.

The main column continued their route, moving on a wide front of 15 miles. Gordon's force had met with no opposition on the way, and was preparing to bivouac at Tevreden at two in the afternoon, when a reconnoitring squadron of the Inniskillings came into collision with Smut's retreating force, 700 strong with two guns and a pom-pom. The enemy turned and attacked vigorously, driving in the squadron with severe loss. Following on they engaged Gordon's bivouac, but were at last checked and forced back with a loss on our side of one officer and five men killed and 23 wounded.

Next morning, so soon as Dickson with the head of the transport came up with the rest of the cavalry, Mahon on the right and Gordon on the left pursued their march. Nothing more than sniping had been encountered, and Gordon, who had reached Mooiplaats near the Vaal, was preparing to bivouac just as the day was closing in and all appeared quiet in front, when a fire was opened upon the outposts from a ridge south-east, where several small bodies of Boers, some 300 in all, had gradually concentrated. Without a moment's delay Gordon pushed forward a regiment and a pom-pom in support of the outpost line. It was six in the evening, and the sun was just setting when the Boers came on with a rush, attempting to drive in the outposts. But they were met by such a fire from pom-pom and carbine that they fell back disheartened from further action, leaving eight killed on the ground.

The next day, Thursday, October 18th, was to find French in occupation of Ermelo, after a march of 19 miles by Spitzkop. Gordon again covered the left flank and marched at seven on Ermelo, followed and harassed all the way on his left and rear by 300

Boers and a pom-pom. Nearing Ermelo he sent on Captain Bettelheim with French's Scouts, who occupied the town, he himself bivouacking on the high ground to the north, and posting pickets along the ridge to the south and east. Only a few British subjects were left in the town, as most of the Boer male population had departed the day before. Water was plentiful, but of food there was little or none.

The march was resumed in the same order next day on Bethal, the enemy always as before threatening the flanks and rear of the column. Approaching the Kaffirspruit Dickson pushed ahead and made good the the crossing, occupying a position beyond the drift. Covered by Mahon from the north, and by Gordon from the south and south-east, the transport passed over unmolested amid a heavy thunderstorm.

About noon Gordon's outposts were severely at-attacked by some Boers, who had crept up unperceived between a herd of cattle that were grazing in a hollow opposite the line of outposts. The squadron in their rear moved up at once to their support, and with the aid of a pom-pom the attacking party was driven back, our side losing one officer and one man killed and 11 wounded. Gordon, as he withdrew closer in from his position east of Rietvlei, was heavily shelled; but our guns answered briskly, and the enemy retired at dark.

On the next day, October 20th, after a 20 miles' march, the whole of General French's force was safely established before nightfall at Bethal, a small village of some 50 houses scattered in a hollow which could be easily defended. French took up his headquarters in the town, and was able, through Standerton, to communicate with the Commander-in-Chief, and record the events of the march.

The troops halted at Bethal over Sunday, October 21st. Riding round the bivouacs, General French addressed each corps separately, as the men fell in, referring to the trying work after Machadodorp, which his troops had grappled with so well, and to the great activity of the enemy in harassing them constantly day and night. The men were in the best of health and spirits, and cheered loudly as the General passed their bivouacs.

Though sniping detachments tried to worry our outposts all day, our guns kept them at a safe distance, and the only casualty was the death of a sergeant, treacherously killed in cold blood near the outposts. Two men in khaki, with haversacks and helmets, rode up to within 1,000 yards of a post of the Carabiniers. Believing them to be our men, the sergeant rode forward to meet them, and was shot dead at close quarters.

At four in the morning of Monday, October 22nd, the force left Bethal in the direction of Heidelberg, through a country of rolling grassland, the great sheep-district of the Transvaal. Some of the prowling Boers fell upon a convoy of 14 wagons containing our wounded, 62 officers and men, who were on their way to Standerton under the Red Cross. The wounded were turned out of eight wagons, which the Boers carried off, leaving them to make what arrangements they could in the remaining six wagons.

A march of 17 miles brought the force to Rooiport, where they bivouacked. It had been intended to reach Trichardtfontein, three miles further, but progress was delayed by a severe storm of thunder, hail, and drenching rain, which brought the animals to a standstill, one flash of lightning alone killing five native drivers and three horses. Thunderstorms and

heavy showers were indeed of daily occurrence for the next week, and caused excessive discomfort to the troops and their animals.

There were not many Boers in front, but sniping parties continued to harass our flanks, falling back whenever they discovered any movement intended against them. The rearguard took every advantage of coming to close quarters with them, and at last managed to deal with them so effectively as to be rid of all further annoyance. The officer commanding the rearguard regiment noticed about 300 Boers, who had followed them from Bethal, quicken their speed with the evident intention of a rush on our rear. Hidden for the moment by a ridge, he halted his men and ordered them to hold back their fire till the Boers were at close quarters. When they were within 400 yards our men discharged their rifles point-blank into their front, while an officer with a handful of men rode into their flank. This counter attack, planned after their own methods, succeeded perfectly; the Boers took to flight in utter confusion, and molested our troops no more during that march.

Eventually, after three days of marching through rain and thunderstorm, the column reached Vlakplaats, from where communication was opened with General Clery south of Geylingstad; and so on, crossing the Honing Spruit Drift, past the Nigel mine to Heidelberg, incessantly sniped at, and occasionally seeing parties of the enemy hanging watchfully, but out of range, on their flanks. The men and horses stood the work well, but the oxen died daily, as, indeed, they had since the commencement of the march. Since the column left Machadodorp no fewer than 1,230 oxen out of 2,400 had succumbed, necessitating the destruction of 55 wagons.

The Springs railway-station was reached on October 30th at one in the afternoon after a march of 19 miles, Dickson's and Mahon's brigades bivouacking at the Great Eastern colliery and Gordon at the Tyne Valley colliery. The next morning the Commander-in-Chief and Staff arrived by train from Johannesburg to review the cavalry. The troops were formed up in line of masses facing the railway, the guns on the right of the brigades, the infantry and field-troops on the left. After Lord Roberts had ridden along the front, the force marched past him in column of troops at a walk. The day was fine and the horses looked well. The Commander-in-Chief appeared greatly impressed with the appearance of the men and the condition of their horses; and, indeed, it was remarkable how well the troops had stood the trials of the advance to Barberton and all the hardships and strain of the march back from Machadodorp. He expressed himself in most appreciative terms to General French, and informed him that he had been appointed to the command of Johannesburg and district.

Not less trying was the last stage of the march back to Pretoria. In the afternoon rain began to fall heavily, and continued through all the next day. By evening the storm grew more boisterous and the troops suffered severely; even the mules, unable to endure the cold, gave out in considerable numbers, 200 dying within a few days. By Bapstfontein and Grootfontein the march continued. After the heavy storms by day and night, the relief was immense when General French and his devoted force at last reached Pretoria at half-past one on Saturday, November 3rd, and came into the tents provided for them to the west of the town. Calling

his brigadiers together, General French issued his farewell orders, and left at once for Johannesburg, where he was informed by Lord Roberts that, in taking over the town and district, he also retained his command of the cavalry, and kept intact his Divisional Staff.

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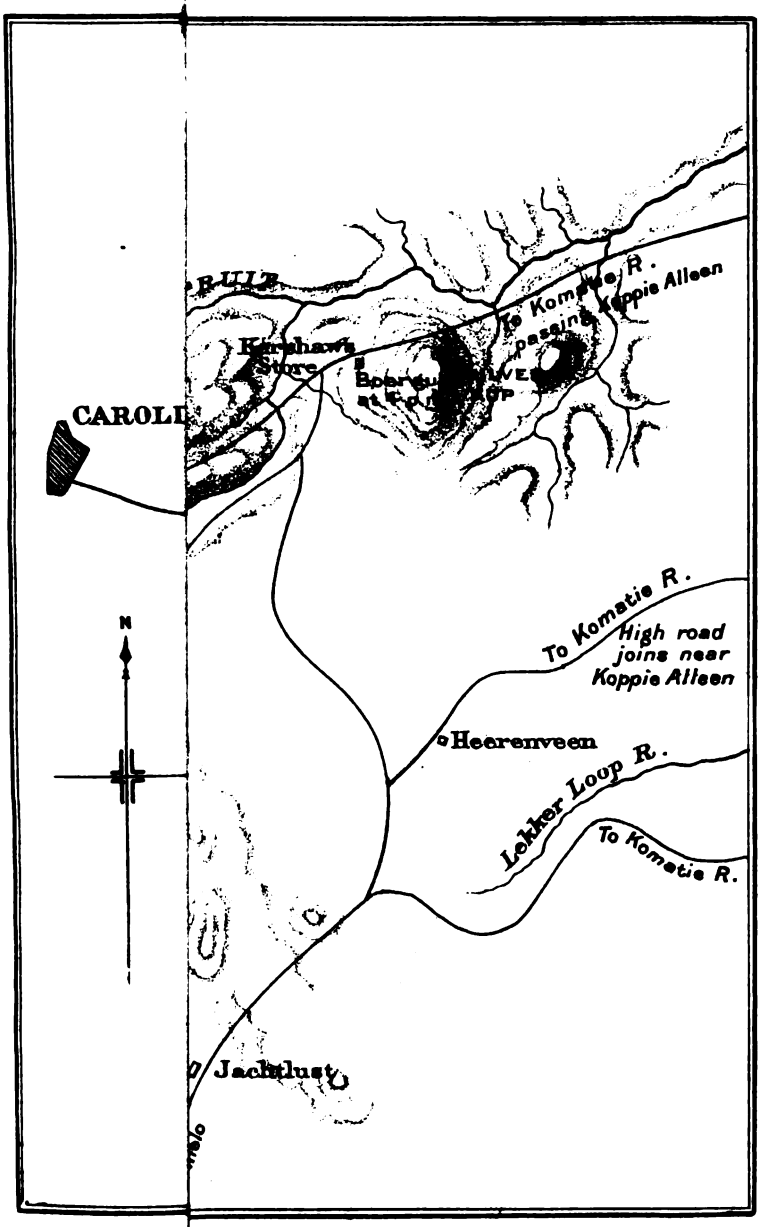

LOADING UP CONVOYS AT MACHADODORP.

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LORD ROBERTS REVIEWING THE CAVALRY AT SPRINGS ON THEIR RETURN FROM BARBERTON.

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APPENDIX A

OBSERVATIONS ON CAVALRY

I. *The Future of Cavalry in War*

AN attempt has been made by certain writers to draw from the experiences of the Boer campaign in South Africa conclusions adverse to the future employment of cavalry armed with sabre or lance. It is insisted that these weapons are as obsolete as the armour of the Crusaders, and that they ought to be relegated to the museum with curiosities such as the pike, the arquebus, and other arms of antiquity. The united offensive action of man and horse, they assert, is no longer effective, and the manœuvres of horsemen in small or large bodies destined to culminate in the charge, will find no place on the modern battlefield. The future operations of mounted men will, in the opinion of these critics, be conducted by what is termed the mounted rifleman, and not by what we understand as cavalry. In other words, it is contended that not the charging lancer but the well-posted rifleman will decide the battle of the future.

In much that has been written lately on the matter of cavalry and mounted infantry a certain confusion of thought is clearly traceable, and it may be of service to place before the reader shortly and clearly what the true rôle of cavalry is, and in what respects the man mounted on a horse, yet only able to fight on foot, falls short of the necessary requirements. It is in no sense intended to criticise adversely the performances of the mounted infantry during the regular phase of the recent campaign, or to institute comparisons between them and the cavalry to the advantage of the latter. But a strange misconception seems to exist among a large portion of the public of the real functions of cavalry, and of the part which, in our own drill-books, is assigned to mounted infantry; and it is with a view to destroy these illusions that the present work has been written, and the attempt has been made to present

in a readable form the story of the cavalry during the Boer War.

It is absolutely certain that the great principles of the art of war remain unchanged through all time. They were the same in the Stone Ages and in the days of armour, and they have remained unchanged by the introduction of firearms and by the modern developments of the repeating rifle and quick-firing artillery. The improvement in modern weapons has merely modified the method of the application of these principles, and this is as true of cavalry as of any other branch of the military system. In some limited senses it may even be contended that the action of cavalry is simplified. The serried ranks of armour-clad foot-soldiers, who protected themselves from the cavalry attack by planting their pikes in the ground in front of them, were practically impenetrable to the charge of mounted men. The looser formations of modern days, a necessary consequence of the improvement of firearms, offer an easier chance to the watchful and dashing cavalry commander. In the one case the cavalry's difficulty commenced when they reached the object of their attack; now the difficulty consists in passing over an intermediate space before the enemy is arrived at. In neither case could the mounted man hope to attain decisive results unless the ranks of his opponent had been previously broken or his nerves shattered by artillery fire or heavy loss. But when once the ranks are broken, when once the infantry man becomes demoralised, the successful charge will be as decisive to-day as in the past. The rôle of cavalry in war may be summed up as follows,—and by cavalry, let it be said, is meant formed bodies of men armed and trained to fight on horseback and on foot.

First of all it may be pointed out that under modern conditions the strategical importance of cavalry will be of as great if not greater than their tactical value. This point is very much insisted upon by writers like Bernhardi,[1] and other leaders of thought on the Continent. The immense size of modern armies, and the necessity of concentration to meet the enemy, entail enormous difficulty in regard to supply, and a consequent increasing nervousness as to keeping open the lines of communication along which this supply is forwarded. The strategical effect of the presence of well-handled mounted divisions will be greater than ever, and without necessarily being committed to any supreme tactical effort, except in respect of similarly mounted bodies, the scope of cavalry duties will be largely increased and new possibilities

[1] *Unsere Kavallerie im nächsten Kriege.*

for success will appear. Under the heading of strategical value may also be considered the possibility of raids. By raids are understood movements at the commencement of hostilities, having as their object the impeding of the mobilisation and concentration of the enemy's forces, the destruction of railways, magazines, &c. Bernhardi is of opinion that such movements are not worth the risk which they entail, and concludes that an advance in force of the cavalry should only be undertaken in this manner by the side which commands so great a numerical superiority that it can afford to sustain heavy loss for the attainment of relatively small success. He adds that there may be cases when it may be necessary to undertake independent cavalry operations during mobilisation, as, for instance, when one's own base is distant from the frontier, but then the operations will be of a purely defensive character. The centre of gravity of cavalry operations in the first stages of a war rests neither in offensive nor defensive action, but in the decisive and important duties which commence when the masses of the army are ready for action.

It is at this point that the tactical rôle of cavalry can be defined. This can be divided into:

(1) The duties of security and information;
(2) Shock action;
(3) Fire action.

Each of these headings demand further explanation.

(1) *Security and Information.*—It is hardly necessary to describe fully the duties classed under the heading of security. It is obvious even to those least aquainted with the study of the art of war, that the security of the slowly moving columns of infantry on the march, and the safety of their bivouacs when halted, must be entrusted to the quicker moving cavalry arm. Small detachments thrust out like a fan many miles in advance of the main columns give early information of any attempt to surprise and entrap the main body before it can deploy for action. Small patrols of the enemy boldly led may indeed penetrate the screen with which it is hoped to cover the movements of our own army; but it should be impossible that large formed bodies can approach without their presence being detected and timely warning being given to our own people. Great as is the importance of thus providing for the security of the army, it is small compared with that of gaining information as to the intentions of the adversary. To use the phrase of one of the ablest of military writers, the "fog of war," in the absence of trained

and highly trained cavalry, shrouds everything in impenetrable mystery. It cripples the energy of the most daring and impetuous leader, and must eventually, if not dispelled, paralyse the very life of an army in the field. To dispel this fog is the primary duty of the cavalry, and if the improvements in modern armament have largely increased the difficulty of successfully accomplishing this task, it is also undoubted that its importance has for strategical reasons increased in a corresponding degree. For the successful performance of the reconnaissance, by which alone information can be gained, the highest mental and physical training is an absolute necessity. It is impossible to give such training to hastily-formed levies; it can only be the outcome of years of careful study on the part of the officer, and months, if not years, of careful training of the individual man. And it is the habit which this training breeds which creates the individuality of the true cavalry soldier. Independence of thought, rapidity of action, self-reliance, the power of correctly drawing deductions from facts are qualities indispensable to the successful performance of this work. Dr. Conan Doyle himself has never penned any story more full of adventure, more vividly interesting, than General Narbonne's description of the work performed by the German cavalry patrols in the first week of August, 1870, and there are few works of greater interest to the student of the art of war.[1] Inasmuch as this work of reconnaissance will have to be carried out at the same time as that of providing for the security of the army, cavalry will have to be specially detailed for this work. And hence it comes about that for tactical purposes the cavalry with an army will be divided into what is termed Divisional Cavalry, and Cavalry Divisions, or Corps. The first will consist of small units of cavalry ranging from a squadron to a brigade, who will be attached to the infantry divisions, or corps, or armies, for the express purpose of providing for the immediate security of the larger bodies of the army, while the cavalry divisions, consisting of two or three brigades under one commander, will be cut loose from the main army with the object, if employed tactically, of piercing the opposing cavalry screen and discovering the intentions of the enemy.

This may involve the necessity of defeating in a tactical encounter the horsemen of the enemy. And now for the first time can be discussed the question of the mounted rifleman, that is, the horseman armed only with the rifle. We may assume that he has received the special cavalry training

[1] *Der Kavalleriedienst im Kriege:* G. v. Pelet Narbonne, Lt.-General

aforesaid, and that in every way he is qualified to perform the duties of cavalry. But he is equipped solely to fight on foot. Hence no sooner does it become necessary for him to assume the offensive than he is forced to dismount, and from that moment his rate of progress depends solely upon the pace he can walk. Moreover he has given hostages to fortune. His led horses being an easy prey to a handful of mounted horsemen, he cannot leave them far behind for, should he lose them, his usefulness for reconnoitring purposes is gone; the opposing cavalry will merely leave him alone and push on through the gap he has left in his screen. It must be remembered that the mounted rifleman cannot fight on horseback. He has no weapon for that purpose, so that his only means of taking the offensive is to fight on foot. But suppose the positions reversed, and the enemy's cavalry trying to push the screen of the mounted rifleman back, or to pierce it. If in open country the mounted rifleman cannot hope to meet the cavalryman mounted. In these circumstances he is practically unarmed, for the firmest believer in the rifle will scarcely maintain that the rifle fire of mounted men is a serious quantity; any one who has experienced it, knows how perfectly ineffective it is. The rifleman must then dismount, either in the open or at the nearest point which will give him some advantage of position or cover for his horses. It may be conceded that the cavalryman, unless in great superiority and in very suitable country, will probably not attack him mounted. He will be content to leave a small portion of his force to watch him, to attack him so soon as he mounts, and with the remainder he will push on. At the most the mounted rifleman possesses a capacity for delaying the advance of the cavalry, and it is worthy of note that during the recent campaign the Boer mounted riflemen were never able to do more than temporarily keep off the advance of the cavalry. In fact they never ventured to seriously dispute that advance, and undoubtedly for the reason that they clearly recognised that undue delay in any position meant the possibility of being caught mounted, and they were careful to avoid this by retiring early directly their flanks were threatened. It cannot be denied that in an enclosed country the rifle will play a more important part than in places suitable to the action of mounted men, but the most that can be urged in this case is that the mounted rifleman and the cavalryman are here on an equality. The former possesses no advantage that the latter does not equally share, while

in an open country the advantage must rest with the man who is equally at home in the combat on horseback or on foot. In fact to deprive your mounted troops of the possibility of action mounted is simply to deny them an advantage with no compensating gain. The whole question comes to this, that, if we suppose the opposing cavalry screens in contact, it is indisputable that the side which brings the preponderance of rifle fire to bear will be in the best position to prevent the other side from breaking through the screen ; but, on the other hand, when it comes to making a dash to penetrate the enemy's screen, that force which fights mounted will have an infinitely greater chance of achieving its object than the one which is compelled to dismount.

So much for the services of security and information. No attempt has been made to go into detail, which can only weary. It is simply hoped to place broad facts before the unprejudiced reader, in order that he may judge for himself a question which is now being widely discussed ; but it cannot be too often repeated, that the strategical value of proper reconnaissance cannot be over-estimated, and that a mistake in training or equipping the force destined for this service will be disastrous.

(2) *Shock Action.*—The much-vexed question of the shock tactics of cavalry must now be considered. The possibility of the employment of cavalry in the field of battle in this manner is said to be a thing of the past. It would be useless to draw examples from previous wars to convince those who only rely on the experience of the past two years. The question for us to consider is whether the correct deductions are being drawn from this experience. It has been stated that the chances for a successful charge have absolutely disappeared with the advent of the repeating rifle, and the advocates of the mounted rifleman triumphantly ask when has the cavalry performed any operation which the former trained as cavalry could not equally well have carried out. It is freely admitted that the opportunities for this form of action have been rare, and that they will become less frequent as a result of the improvement of modern firearms. But to assume that such opportunities will never occur, is, it is maintained, an unsound deduction. And, further, it can be shown that this war has produced such occasions which have been brilliantly taken advantage of. The charge of the Lancer Brigade on the day of the relief of Kimberley has not been appreciated at its true value. It has been already described in the pages of this book. Yet here were all the

elements of disaster if the theories of some writers are correct. An entrenched position, strongly held by riflemen still flushed with success and full of the memory of Magersfontein, was charged and carried in addition with trifling loss by French's mounted men; and, the enemy were so dispersed and demoralised, that no attempt was made to check the further advance of the cavalry division, while the besieging commandos round Kimberley deserted their camps and positions, and hurried north in a rout which nothing but the exhaustion of French's horses prevented from becoming a disaster of the first magnitude. Consider the situation if mounted riflemen alone had been available on that day. They would have been compelled to dismount and attempt to take by assault two lofty positions strongly held. This could only have been done if supported by a strong force of infantry, and then only with considerable loss. None but those in the highest position can say what the result of another day's bombardment of Kimberley might have been, and it is impossible to forecast what Cronje might have succeeded in doing had there been 48 hours more for him to make good his retirement north. At a time when hours and minutes were of incalculable value, the one expedient would have been to resort to the slow and costly infantry attack. It would be wrong to force this argument too far, and to maintain that cavalry will always succeed in such enterprises boldly carried out; but it is fair to assume that given broken or demoralised infantry, or hastily raised troops loosely held together by unaccustomed bonds of discipline, the chances of success for the *arme blanche* are sufficiently great to make it unwise to discard the sword or lance, especially if no corresponding advantage is gained by so doing. The point which cannot be too often emphasised is that the mounted rifleman, admirable as he may be when you have no time to raise and train anything else, is and can only be a makeshift, and that where he fails is in his want of power rapidly to assume the offensive. And it is in the power to assume the offensive that the very soul of cavalry action lies. The tremendous effect of rifle fire under modern conditions is obvious. But theories based on mathematical calculations of the number of pounds or tons of lead which can be thrown over a given area in a given space of time are apt to be misleading. The human factor has still to be reckoned with; and although it may certainly be said that the shock tactics of cavalry in respect of infantry have depreciated in value as a result of modern invention, it can as certainly be maintained, judging by practical experience, that opportunities will occur

when a beaten or demoralised infantry will fall an easy prey to a dashing cavalry attack. The acceptance of such an opportunity may have momentous results. Who can say what the effect of the rush of a well-handled division would have been upon Methuen's army, when the Highland Brigade was shattered to pieces on the morning of Magersfontein? As a matter of fact, Lord Methuen was enabled to effect an orderly retirement to the south bank of the Modder River, and from that position to hold in check a force numerically equal to his own. What might have been a disaster was converted into a check, a failure to accomplish a definite design, and nothing more. And yet Methuen was confronted by the mounted rifleman *par excellence*; so at least the newspaper critics tell us.

It has been said that in the latter stages of the campaign the cavalry as such failed to reap any advantage from this quality to act mounted, and this has been used as an argument in favour of the theory that shock action is a thing of the past. The argument has much apparently in its favour; but a more careful study of the conditions will show that this apparent want of opportunity is due to other and perfectly well understood causes. Mention has been made of the strategical use of cavalry and its increased value in modern warfare. By the strategical use of cavalry is meant the use of that arm in such a fashion that without of necessity engaging in any tactical action, certain well-defined effects are produced. A concrete case will explain the argument more clearly. At the action of the Zand River, which has been described in this work, French's cavalry division was employed on the extreme left flank of the army to produce a purely tactical effect. That is to say, the result of his operations on that day could only and did only have the effect of causing the enemy gradually, and in perfect order, to withdraw from his positions commanding the passage of the river. This lightened the task of the infantry, but in the nature of things had no particular result on the operations except in so far that it permitted the English army to advance practically unopposed to Kroonstad. The effect was purely tactical, for the early withdrawal of the enemy, unbeaten, undemoralised, gave no chance to cavalry shock action. The case would have been far different had the cavalry been employed strategically. In this case we may suppose the cavalry division 100 miles to the north of the army. Suppose the railway-bridge at Hoening Spruit destroyed, and the cavalry division moving south while the

army was halted south of the Zand River. The strategic effect is produced at once. The Boer leaders must either stand and fight in the hope of a tactical success, which is to save the situation, or they must disperse. Their way north is barred, the railway is no longer available for the withdrawal of guns and transport. The effect on ill-disciplined troops hastily brought together is incalculable; and then comes the opportunity for the shock tactics of cavalry. That this opportunity was denied to the cavalry in this particular instance may have arisen for reasons known only to the higher command, and which may have been carefully considered and calculated beforehand. But it was in no sense a matter which was at the discretion of the cavalry leader or of the troops he led. The conclusion is almost forced upon the reader that the intention not to commit the army to a pitched battle, during the events which followed the capture of Bloemfontein, was deliberately arrived at. Otherwise it is hard to account for the use which was made of the mounted troops during this period. For political reasons it may have been considered that further bloodshed was, if possible, to be avoided, and it was undoubtedly a humane and generous decision. Unhappily the events in the north and east of the Orange River Colony during June, 1900, upset the chances of an early termination of hostilities after the occupation of Pretoria, and the price which the nation has had to pay, and is still paying, for this unfortunate policy is known to all the world. As a matter of fact, on the only two occasions on which the cavalry were cut free from the main army to fulfil a strategic rôle, the operations were brilliantly successful. These occasions were the relief of Kimberley and the heading of Cronje in his retreat to Bloemfontein. From that time forward the part played by the cavalry, as is sufficiently demonstrated in this book, was purely tactical, and the result, so far as it went, was remarkable in a very high degree. Our army was enabled to march from Bloemfontein to Pretoria practically without striking a blow. It may well have been that the Commander-in-Chief considered that the attainment of this feat would bring the war to a conclusion. It was a perfectly possible opinion to hold, and probably was more nearly being realised than the general public are aware of. But to deduce therefrom that all chance of shock action for cavalry in the future has for ever disappeared, is entirely to misunderstand the lessons of the war.

(3) *Fire Action.*—The increased importance of developing the power of cavalry to fight dismounted is admitted by all.

But if the strategical use of cavalry as before defined, together with the special cavalry work of reconnaissance, are to be the most important functions of the arm in future, it should be very clearly defined when and where dismounted action is to form part of its work. Von Balck, in his work on Tactics, says with justice that the dismounted action of cavalry is limited in its usefulness and freedom of movement by its led horses, and that heavy loss in a decisive fire-fight makes it unfit for its own special duties as cavalry, while defeat means disaster. Hence, he concludes, that except in guerilla warfare, the attack on foot should only be resorted to in extreme cases. These observations refer, of course, to the employment of large bodies of cavalry, whole regiments or brigades, for the attack dismounted of positions held by the enemy. The occasions on which it is clear that dismounted fire-action is within the scope of cavalry duties are :—

1. When reconnoitring, to clear away the enemy from positions which block the advance. This, with the assistance of the horse-artillery attached to the cavalry division, is not a serious matter, for it is unlikely that such positions will be held by large detached portions of the enemy's army. If they are, the situation is changed, and it will rest with the higher command to decide how such a strong detached force is to be treated.
2. To hold tactical points till the arrival of the infantry.
3. In retirements, to hold off the enemy with dismounted fire.
4. In pursuit, to seize points in rear of the enemy and to harass hostile columns on the march.
5. To alarm or deceive the enemy.
6. To protect their own bivouacs or quarters.

Although the employment of cavalry for the attack of strongly held positions on foot is not recommended except in exceptional cases, it is decidedly necessary that they should be fully and carefully instructed in the principles of fire-tactics and the method of conducting these operations. To any squadron leader it should be a matter of course to be prepared to lead his whole squadron dismounted to the attack of small isolated positions, farmhouses, villages, &c. It should never be possible for a considerable force of cavalry to be indefinitely delayed by the presence of a few boldly led riflemen ; and instruction in this, as well as confidence in his complete ability to overcome such obstacles, form an essential part of cavalry training. The other occasions on which fire-action will play a prominent part do not call for

any special comment. They are sufficiently obvious; but the question of the employment of cavalry dismounted in the attack proper is an important one, and deserves careful consideration. It is probably with the view of dealing with this problem that mounted infantry has been attached to cavalry divisions. The function of mounted infantry is clearly laid down in our own text-books as follows:—

It cannot be too frequently impressed upon all ranks that they are in no sense cavalry. They are only intended to fight on foot, their horses, ponies, camels, or other means of locomotion, being provided to enable them to make long and more rapid movements than the ordinary infantry soldier could effect. Commanders of Mounted Infantry will remember that when the assistance of cavalry cannot be depended on, their best security is to be found by keeping in broken, intersected woody or marshy ground where they will have a great advantage over cavalry.—*Regulations for Mounted Infantry*, 1899.

We find here clearly and precisely laid down the function of mounted infantry, and this rôle is allotted to this arm because in the first place its initial training is infantry training pure and simple. This constitutes the radical difference between cavalry and what is termed mounted riflemen on the one hand and mounted infantry on the other. Infantry training is not intended and cannot include such instruction as is required for cavalry in respect of reconnaissance and similar detached duties. The end and aim of cavalry training is to foster individuality and initiative. These qualities are not a necessary consequence of infantry training, however desirable they may be, nor are they so necessary an element as in the case of the soldier who is constantly called upon to act alone. If, then, we are to assume that cavalry will only in extreme cases be engaged in large bodies in offensive action dismounted, and that those cases will in regular warfare be the exception, the addition of mounted infantry to cavalry divisions, whether as a pivot of manœuvre or for any other reason, seems superfluous. Good cavalry should be independent of the assistance of mounted infantry, and French's Colesberg campaign, which hitherto has not attracted the attention of the general public, will be for all time an example of what cavalry can accomplish in the hands of an able leader. It is no exaggeration to say that had it not been for the consummate ability of the leader and the admirable quality of the mounted troops backed up by a handful of infantry, the history of this war would have been far different, and the conquest of Africa from the Cape to Zambesi might have proved a task that would have taxed the resources of the Empire to the utmost.

It would appear that the proper place for mounted infantry, if this force is considered indispensable in the future, is more in connection with the infantry columns where it would be placed at the disposal of the higher command to produce decisive tactical results in the infantry fight. It is easy to understand that a division of mounted infantry which can be rapidly transported from one point of the battlefield to another might have a decisive effect in either the attack or defence of positions, but its precise rôle in connection with cavalry is not so easy to understand. The relation of the mounted rifleman to cavalry has been discussed before, and is a totally different question. In this case the discussion limits itself to the advantage or disadvantage of arming cavalry with a sword or lance or some other weapon with which they can fight mounted.

It is, however, of the first importance to consider whether any country can afford to keep a force like mounted infantry which requires horses or ponies as part of its equipment. The supply of horses in war is one of the most difficult questions in connection with cavalry, and the resources of any country will be taxed to the utmost to maintain the efficiency of the arm at the necessary standard without being called upon to supply additional remounts for a mounted force which is not cavalry. It is hardly too much to say that had the mounted troops in South Africa in February, 1900, been reduced by one-half, the remaining half would have been more than doubled in efficiency. And this was solely due to the difficulty of supplying remounts. It was by no means uncommon to find regular cavalry regiments from 800 to 900 strong in men, having only half that number mounted, while the authorities were busy raising irregular mounted regiments composed of men who had practically received no previous military training. The false economy of such methods is obvious.

If the cavalry of the future is not to be up to the highest standard of efficiency in the duties which it will have to perform, it would be better and cheaper to do away with it altogether. So far as mounted riflemen are concerned there is no economy in substituting a man armed with a rifle trained in cavalry duties for a man armed with a rifle and sword or lance. Mounted infantry are undoubtedly cheaper to maintain and easier to raise than cavalry; but they are no substitute for cavalry, and cannot in any sense be taken as replacing them.

If cavalry is to play the part which has been briefly

sketched here, and in particular if its strategical importance be estimated at its correct value, it is essential that its training in dismounted work should be more extended and more scientifically taught than has hitherto been the case. It is equally necessary that the cavalry should be armed with something better than the present carbine. If this is done, and there should be no difficulty in the production of a weapon which will put the cavalryman dismounted on a par with the infantryman, there will be no object in attaching mounted infantry to cavalry.

On the whole it seems likely that the duties of cavalry in future wars will be of much the same description as in the past, with this addition, that, inasmuch as the modern conditions of warfare have increased the strategical importance of mounted troops, new opportunities for success will arise although the tactical difficulties in the way of achieving it have increased. These difficulties are not to be overcome by reducing the fighting capacity of cavalry by depriving them of the power of action mounted, but rather by increased instruction, and by careful and practical organisation in peace. You cannot improvise cavalry, nor can you make cavalry by putting a man on a horse and calling him a cavalryman. We need a standard of efficiency which shall be tested by work in the field, and not by show work in the barrack-yard, and this standard will only be attained when it is recognised by the public that you cannot make bricks without straw.

Weak cadres of men and horses in peace time are fatal to efficiency. A cavalry regiment in peace time should maintain five squadrons at full working strength of men and horses. The squadron commander will then have a definite unit for whose training and efficiency he alone is responsible. He will be able to make or mar his name by the result of his own work. How can any man be responsible for a unit which when mobilised consists of a large percentage of reservists whom he has never seen, and waiters and employed men whom he has never had the opportunity of training? Such a system is hopeless.

But if a high ideal of the duties and possibilities of cavalry is set before our officers, and the means of instruction and training placed within their reach, we shall possess in our next great war a force which, if led by men of the stamp of General French, will prove to the world that the day of cavalry is far indeed from being past.

II. *Notes on the Work of the Cavalry during the Boer War*

As suggestions adverse to the use of cavalry have never been made before by serious exponents of the science of war, notwithstanding that we have repeatedly witnessed the struggles of great empires, it follows that the grounds on which these novel theories are based must be looked for in the experiences of the South African campaign, and in the part played therein by the cavalry.

That the country has been roused to a consciousness of its deficiencies is a good sign. Had we done more than merely accept the reforms forced upon the military systems of civilised nations by the Franco-German war; had we taken warning from the unpreparedness of the French, and kept ever before our eyes the wisdom of making ready for war in time of peace; had we learnt some of those valuable lessons taught by the Russo-Turkish war,—such as entrenchment in the matter of attack, and the futility of frontal assaults against entrenched positions—the course of our contest with the Boers might have been different.

But anxiety to profit by the past and to remedy defects revealed by the struggle must not be allowed to lead us astray. We must be careful that our deductions are based on accurate premises. To make sure of our ground, we must see that effects are traced to their true causes, and must ascertain how far these causes are due to circumstances within or without our control. This caution is especially needed in dealing with so important a controversy as that which has arisen over the uses of cavalry, for there is always the danger of being misled by the hasty judgment of those who have raised a cry against the maintenance of this arm, because its achievements have, in their opinion, fallen short of the successes of Rossbach, Marengo, and Dresden.

In order to arrive at a clearer issue it is necessary to take into account the physical conditions of the country in which our cavalry operated, and the fighting methods of the enemy, and to determine to what extent these conditions affected the action of our horsemen. Nor is it of less importance that we should consider at the same time the conditions that existed on our side; the conditions under which the cavalry took the field, their equipment, their mounts, and the direction given to their action by those in supreme command. Only a grasp of all these circumstances will enable us to trace to their true cause

the failures that, in theory at least, should have been successes, and to discover the reasons for the neglect of opportunities which, in the opinion of experts, justify the maintenance of cavalry. With this knowledge to guide him, and having before him an explicit narrative, the critic ought to be able to weigh, with some approach to accuracy, the merits of the cavalry during the war, and to assign to their proper place the circumstances and influences that have stood in the way of a more dazzling record.

Opponents of cavalry put their case on one main ground,—that during two and a half years of incessant fighting the occasions on which cavalry have succeeded in effective attack or pursuit with lance or sabre have been few, and that large and disorganised masses of the enemy have constantly evaded them. Without questioning the substantial accuracy of this contention, and without entering at present on the controversy as to whether or not the mounted troops succeeded in all that was demanded of them, it may be pointed out that this ground is altogether too narrow and leaves uncovered many important duties of cavalry. Some of these duties have already been alluded to in general terms, but in order to apply them to certain phases of the war, it may be permitted to dwell upon them in greater detail.

All the leading military powers use cavalry mainly for aggressive purposes. It is a proposition which needs no demonstration, that in the event of war the nation that relied solely on infantry and artillery would be at an overwhelming disadvantage in conflict with an army supported largely by mounted men who can fight on horse as well as on foot. In Germany, for example, modern arms and modern methods, so far from bringing the conviction that cavalry is a thing of the past, have created a profound belief in new and extended possibilities for its operations. One of the direct consequences of this belief has been to force the standard of scientific and technical training to a point that makes almost superhuman demands on cavalry leaders.

The main business of cavalry may be stated thus:—

1. To overthrow opposing cavalry, and thereby gain an enormous advantage over the enemy in the first stages of the war.

2. To perform services of security and information.

(*a*) To screen the movements of your army.

(*b*) To pierce the screen of the enemy, and obtain information of his movements.

3. To stem the tide of disaster (as at Vionville in 1870)

by throwing the cavalry on to the victorious troops of the enemy.

4. To protect the flanks of the army.

5. To complete the overthrow of a beaten enemy.

6. To cover the retirement of a beaten army and enable them to reform by delaying the advance of the enemy.

7. The cavalry to cut itself loose from the main army and operate strategically.

8. To undertake raids against the enemy's communications.

An obvious condition of the discharge of these duties is the opportunity of meeting the enemy's cavalry, or of encountering some arm over which a tactical advantage may be gained. Now, did the Boers supply this primary condition? We know, of course, that they had no cavalry, in the technical and proper sense of the term, and we know also that they almost invariably shunned encounter. Only on very rare occasions did they make up their minds to fight to a finish, and whenever any instant danger threatened, all save the most resolute moved off, and those who remained took up an impregnable position. These tactics were repeatedly illustrated in the march from Bloemfontein to Pretoria. During that advance the cavalry fought only rear or flank guards of the enemy, while the infantry were never engaged at close quarters. And for this reason,—the moment the Boers saw their flank or rear threatened by cavalry operations, they retired to a new position, and frustrating our chance of capturing their wagons and guns by sending them on often a whole day in advance, fought rearguard actions with one or two mobile and long-range guns, a few pom-poms, and 1000 or 2000 of their best mounted and most resolute men. Our advanced guards alone could get touch with these rearguards, and being composed of tired men and worn-out horses, were never able to approach near enough to strike an effective blow. Except at Belmont, Graspan, and Paardeberg, no battle was fought on the western side that could have had any decisive result. At Paardeberg the enemy were surrounded, starved and shot into surrender, while at Belmont and Graspan the cavalry were ridiculously inadequate in strength, and, after hard reconnaissance work, were unfit to pursue. On the Natal side our attacks were rarely pressed home, save at Elandslaagte and at Pieter's Hill, and at Elandslaagte the cavalry were, for once, in a position to make good use of their opportunity.

Examples might be multiplied, but enough has been said to make it plain that disinclination on the part of the enemy

to fight a decisive action, and his first care being to ensure safe retreat, made pursuit all but impracticable. Their tactics of retiring from position to position, not merely prevented them from being forced into action but saved them from being beaten; and it is an axiom of war that great results can be expected from cavalry pursuit only when that pursuit is the crowning action of a decisive victory. It might thus be inferred that if other nations at war with us were to adopt the tactics of the Boers, pursuit would be impossible; but in fact by employing these methods the Boers defeated their own object. Any civilised nation, which really understands the conduct of war, knows that the enemy must be faced, and the issue fought out somewhere to the bitter end, and that by constantly avoiding battle they cannot hope to win. Even the Boers, though without such vital points as London and Paris, threw away their best chances of success by their aversion against assuming the offensive.

One consolation and one lesson may therefore be derived from the reluctance on the part of the Boers to be drawn into action that might expose them to cavalry pursuit. It has not saved them from final defeat and surrender, while it has demonstrated the futility of hoping to defend a country with half-trained and undisciplined levies against the attack of trained troops.

So much for the restrictions imposed on cavalry operations by the characteristics peculiar to Boer warfare. There comes now the question as to the manner in which the cavalry were employed. Were they or were they not hampered by the conditions laid down by those in supreme command? Was their scope of achievement narrowed by the manifest reluctance to employ them strategically in order to bring about a tactical success? The answer to these questions must in part at least refute or confirm those who impugn the leadership, training, and efficiency of this arm on the ground that it has failed to produce a series of thrilling records such as gild the history of the war between the Northern and Southern States of America.

The operations about Colesberg furnish many proofs of the value of cavalry when properly employed; and we know the decisive and far-reaching results of the dash on Kimberley and the holding up of Cronje at Paardeberg. These brilliant exceptions must leave the impression that the true functions of cavalry were not sufficiently appreciated by the authorities responsible for the initial plan of campaign, and that from excess of caution the cavalry were not turned to the best

account by the Commander-in-Chief in the progressive stages of the war.

It would be difficult to overestimate the effect that might have been produced at Colenso, had Sir Redvers Buller, instead of making a frontal attack, weakened the Boer centre and right by a threatened assault on their left at and beyond Hlangwane, and allowed Sir George White to co-operate by a feint attack on the rear, while the cavalry and mounted troops in Ladysmith, then in fair trim, and the cavalry and mounted troops of the relief force at Frere (a combination of about 7,000 men) made a simultaneous dash wide of the enemy's right on Potgieters Drift, and established themselves at commanding points to cover the advance of the infantry. A movement of this kind must have endangered the Boer line of communication with the Orange River Colony, and have paralysed and bewildered the action of the enemy. Again, had Sir Redvers followed up his advantage when the relief of Ladysmith was assured, and sent his cavalry in pursuit of the Boers, retreating, by their own admission, in the utmost confusion, he might have inflicted such a crushing defeat on them as would have quelled all further opposition in Natal, and enabled him to co-operate sooner with Lord Roberts's advance north. And even on the western side, had the cavalry in their advance on Kroonstad and Pretoria, and, later, on Belfast, been allowed to cut themselves loose from the main column, the course of events might have been changed materially for the better; the line of retreat to the east might have been cut, and the Boers, instead of leisurely retiring before Lord Roberts, might have been forced into a decisive action.

Apart from these considerations there prevail in South Africa certain physical and local conditions that go far to explain why the cavalry were not more effective with lance and sabre, and at the same time enable us to estimate their achievements with greater accuracy.

South Africa is a land of many latitudes and vast reaches, of boundless plains seamed with ridges and traversed at wide intervals by river courses, all of which are well adapted for defensive action. The shock tactics of cavalry require open ground, generally free from large obstructions, like rocky kopjes, thick bush, and strong fences. In the Orange River Colony such ground is the rule rather than the exception, whereas in the Transvaal the terrain usually alternates between open plains and steep mountainous areas, the passes through which lead from one plain to another. Early in the

war the fences were an obstacle, but as they were of wire, which was easily cut, and as they were never replaced, they became in time no hindrance to the movements of mounted troops. In the Orange Free State, therefore, the conditions were favourable; but at least two opposing forces are needed for a fight, and in the presence of cavalry operating on favourable ground the Boers refused to give battle. In the latter stages of the war, particularly, they gave our horsemen no chance, seeing that they never moved in large formed bodies. On two occasions only did they attempt, without artillery, to dispute the movements of cavalry in open country; and on each of these occasions our troops had hardly moved 100 yards to ride them down, before the enemy, discharging one or two wild volleys, scrambled on to their ponies, and scurried over the plain in a flying mob.

I have already referred to the Boer's tactics in retreat, and have spoken of his skill in selecting a covering position, a skill surpassed only by his adroitness in retiring from it without exposing himself to danger. Experienced soldiers recognise in the Boer a past master in the art of rear-guard fighting. Military history furnishes innumerable illustrations of the success with which rearguards, effectively disposed and skilfully handled, may baffle an enemy, and render of little or no avail the most energetic and determined pursuit. Wellington himself followed hard on the heels of Massena, in his retreat from the lines of Torres Vedras, over hundreds of miles of difficult country intersected by rivers and traversed by mountains which hampered the movements of the French artillery and baggage. Yet, by skilful rearguard manœuvres, Ney foiled every attempt of the great British general. How much more signal might have been his success if the main body of the rearguard had been composed of mounted riflemen instead of infantry? With extended posts and the increased mobility that such a force would have given, he could have deceived the enemy as to the real game he was playing. Again, with what greater ease and rapidity would Marmont's transport and artillery have eluded pursuit if his line of retreat had lain along a good railway, or by roads known intimately by the retiring forces, roads that ran through a country studded with rocky kopjes that concealed every movement, and gave to the fugitives the most extended and inaccessible of rearguard positions. These advantages the Boers possessed, and they availed themselves of them to the full measure of their experience and capacity. Supplied with early and accurate information from native and other

sources, they often began their retreat hours in advance, and when we, seeing their entrenchments and defensive positions, from which our patrols had drawn fire at all points, were looking for decisive action, they were actually on the march, with guns and transport well in front, blowing up bridges and rendering the railway useless to their pursuers.

Another cause,—of equal if not greater importance, and one not altogether beyond our control—contributed to the failure of our cavalry to get within effective striking distance. On two occasions to which I have alluded, a vigorous effort was made to engage the enemy on open ground; but the condition of our horses was so bad that the utmost that could be got out of them was a slow trot. How little the vital importance of this question of mounts was realised at home may be inferred not merely from the famous cable to the Colonies,—"Unmounted men preferred"—but also from the fact that the majority of the cavalry horses were sent out in the last ships. A direct consequence of this delay was that the horses had not time to become hard and fit before taking the field. Landed in a strange climate, after a long and tedious voyage, they were absolutely unprepared for fast work, exposure, and hardship. Yet dire necessity demanded that they should be hurried to the front even before they had regained the free use of their legs. The inevitable result followed; many dropped dead, while many more became useless after one or two hard marches, and the loss of condition could rarely be recovered by those that survived.

The demands made on the cavalry would have put to the severest test horses not only thoroughly seasoned and acclimatised but well fed. And how did they fare in the matter of forage? The length and congestion of the single line of communication made the transport of food extremely difficult, and the horses were the first to suffer. Can it be wondered then, that the Boer,—always an admirable horse-master, who gets every ounce out of his mount—with his pony bred in the country, thoroughly seasoned and acclimatised, lightly equipped and well fed, was able to out-distance the jaded, worn, under-fed, and over-burdened troop-horse of the British army, especially as the Boers, who never continued to hold their positions as soon as the cavalry approached their flanks, had at least 800 yards start? These conditions told with even greater force against the horse-artillery. What chance of effective pursuit was possible by a cavalry division with horses that started after a month of semi-starvation, during which strain after strain had been put upon them in quick

succession? How, on such an occasion as Poplar Grove, could horses pursue a fleet and mobile enemy after a long day's engagement, in which they had covered 40 miles, and had turned the Boers out of position after position? Though the relief of Kimberley and the interception of Cronje made huge gaps in the ranks, and though the brilliant success of these manœuvres was instantly recognised as being due to the cavalry, there was no improvement in the remounts despatched to the front.

Hitherto I have dwelt on the causes of failure and of imperfect achievement, as it is from these that useful lessons may be taught. But it must not be imagined that the cavalry were without triumphs in a campaign that has abounded in heroic deeds. Their success as scouts is often denied, yet experts who have had opportunity of personal observation, will readily acknowledge that the scouting on the whole has been excellent, allowing for the peculiar conditions of the country and the characteristics of the enemy. So much, at least, might confidently be expected from the cavalryman, who is trained not merely to understand the power of the horse as an element in tactics, but is taught in reconnoitring to act and think for himself in a degree not usual in other arms of the service. The nature of the country, the use of long-range rifles, the secrecy of smokeless powder, the cunning with which the enemy concealed himself, the craft with which he permitted advance scouts to pass before opening fire,—all these made the work of reconnaissance difficult and hazardous to a degree hitherto unknown, and has often rendered useless the individuality and power of initiative that are essential qualifications of cavalrymen. Yet despite these obstacles the occasions have been rare on which the presence of the enemy has not been discovered and reported in good time, with the exception of Sannah's Post, to the peculiar circumstance of which allusions have already been made.

The skill and courage displayed by patrol leaders in the matter of reconnaissance was a particular feature of the cavalry work in this war.

The foregoing narrative has set forth the achievements of the cavalry,—the operations round Colesberg, which enabled the army to move from the Orange and Modder Rivers to the relief of Kimberley, and also prevented the early invasion of Cape Colony; the wide flanking movement in the advance from Bloemfontein to Pretoria, which helped to clear the country for the main army; and the march on Barberton, which cleared Lord Roberts's right

flank, and which saved Generals Ian Hamilton and Pole-Carew the necessity of falling back for supplies, or, at any rate, delaying their advance on the Komati River until transport could reach them from the west. These are among the great, though unsensational, achievements of the cavalry under General French. There have been occasions also when cavalry have shown not merely capacity, but adaptability, which has proved of the utmost value in defence as well as in attack. At Lombard's Kop, on October 30th, and again at Wagon Hill, on January 6th, when the Boers made their desperate attempt to capture Ladysmith, the cavalry fought on foot, and fought with a skill and dash that won the admiration of all who saw them. At Elandslaagte they took part in every phase of the engagement. It was the Imperial Light Horse (trained as cavalry) who reconnoitred the position at dawn and cleared the hill to the east of the railway, so that the infantry could be detrained within striking distance. When the advance on the Boer position began, they dismounted on the right of the Gordons, and outflanking the enemy's left, rendered the position untenable. Finally, the 5th Dragoon Guards and the 5th Lancers closed the action with a successful pursuit. The charge of the Lancer Brigade, after leaving Klip Drift on the Modder River, in the dash on Kimberley, is one of the finest examples in history of the moral effect of cavalry. But the crowning instance of all is the famous ride from Kimberley to Koedoesrand Drift, to head off Cronje and trap him into surrender. Had not French's cavalry swept down unexpectedly on the enemy's convoy as it approached the drift, and cut off all means of escape, Cronje would have remained in the field, and the course of events might have been radically changed.

But the convincing argument in favour of cavalry remains to be stated. Never have the Boers faced mounted troops under conditions such as are certain to occur in a war between great military powers, having at their command large bodies of men highly trained and organised for aggressive as well as defensive operations. The success with which the Boers have dragged on the war has led some people to imagine that what is wanted in any future campaign is not the cavalryman, whose training is based on shock tactics, but the mounted infantryman, or rifleman of the Colonial type. Yet, in truth, the Boers, who are considered to be the best mounted riflemen of to-day, have invariably beat a hasty retreat when confronted by cavalry that could fight on horseback with

carbine, lance, and sabre. The natural inference to be drawn from this undoubted fact is, that in order to defeat cavalry in the open you must employ cavalry. Had the enemy had a cavalry division among the besiegers of Kimberley, the relief of the town, if it could have been effected at all, would have involved great difficulty and loss.

Some of the general conclusions to which an impartial critic must be compelled, after a careful study of the conditions and circumstances of the cavalry operations in South Africa, may be briefly summed up. The Boer tactics were unfavourable to pursuit, whereas their strategy afforded opportunities that were either neglected owing to the want of recognition of those in supreme command of one of the great uses of cavalry, or were allowed to slip by from a sense of excessive caution. Kept strictly within narrow limits, the only chance of success lay in the efficiency of the cavalry horse, one of the weakest points in our organisation. These determining factors should be thoroughly weighed and understood in passing judgment on the worth of the cavalry, and it is only by proceeding from such a basis that we can properly mark and measure the actual services and achievement they have rendered in spite of the continued check on their initiative and impetus. The necessity for retaining troops who can fight on horseback has not been disproved, but rather strengthened by the action of the enemy when confronted with this arm under conditions that must often prevail in other countries and with other armies. Reforms, of course, are urgent. The experience of the campaign will be worthless if our cavalry are not better mounted in peace time as well as in war, if changes are not made in equipment, if transport be not organised to carry much of that now carried on horseback, if better fire-discipline and better shooting are not insisted on, and, above all, if drill-exercise be not largely supplemented by field-training.

APPENDIX B

NOTES ON RECONNAISSANCE

THE importance of reconnaissance is thus summed up in the first paragraph of our *Combined Training Regulations*: "Success in war depends largely on timely information concerning (*a*) the enemy, (*b*) the immediate or probable scene of operations, (*c*) co-operating bodies of our own troops."

A number of instances might be quoted to illustrate the great meaning of this fundamental observation, but it will suffice to recall the circumstances which led to the interception of MacMahon's army while hastening to the relief of Bazaine at Metz and which eventuated in the battle of Sedan. Here cavalry reconnaissance of the most daring nature discovered that MacMahon had abandoned Châlons, and had struck north. This information caused the third and Meuse army-corps, then advancing on Châlons, to change their direction from west to north, and having succeeded in heading off the French army, forced MacMahon into a conflict that determined the issue of the war.

Many instances also might be cited in which during the South African campaign reconnaissances have rendered valuable information, but it would exceed the scope of this book to treat the subject in great detail, and my object will be served by quoting one of the many occasions on which such reconnaissance has proved invaluable. The method employed then, and afterwards modified to make it more adaptable to Boer tactics and to the nature of the country, is a matter of practical interest, and with that purpose is briefly discussed in the following pages.

At the beginning of the war it was our custom to employ special patrols, for the most part under the command of officers, ahead of and distinct from the advanced flank and rearguards, according to the practice laid down in our drill-

books. General French's plan in the Colesberg operations, as we have seen, was to push forward reconnoitring detachments to make good some intermediate ground, where, taking up a defensive position, they could serve as a rallying point for the officers' patrols which were sent to explore the country to the front, and on the flanks, and to determine the enemy's positions, while penetrating as far as possible into and beyond his lines.

From this point of view the account of the officer's patrol that crept up within the outskirts of Colesberg is interesting and instructive.

On the morning of December 26th General French personally reconnoitred the country from Arundel to the kopjes south of Kuilfontein. The enemy apparently held the Taaiboschlaagte position and the hills west of the railway as far as the Hanover-Colesberg road. Small parties were observed on the Platberg and some 50 Boers in and around Kuilfontein farmhouse, immediately below the kopje from which French was making his observations. The General determined to send a patrol round the enemy's right flank to observe and report on the approaches to Colesberg from the south-west, and he accordingly ordered two officers of his Staff to make themselves sufficiently acquainted with the country to carry out this duty.

At ten in the evening Major Garratt's squadron of the Carabiniers left Arundel and arrived at the Kuilfontein kopjes at two next morning. They occupied the kopjes commanding the passes through this chain, and at about an hour before dawn Captains Lawrence and Vaughan, with a patrol of 10 men under Lieutenant Rundle of the Carabiniers, moved off down the road towards Colesberg. Leaving the road about half a mile south of the farm, which was known to be occupied by Boers, the patrol marched stealthily northwards. Over stone walls, through a marsh, blundering up against wire fences (which were cut as soon as discovered) the patrol held on through the dark. When dawn broke they found that they had kept to the right direction, and were passing Maeders farm on their right. Throwing out a couple of men to front and flanks they broke into a gallop, making for a low kopje which promised a good view north and east. Concealing their men, with only a couple watching each flank, the officers climbed to the top, whence they could see Coleskop and the outlying houses of Colesberg. Eastward spread out a formidable array of kopjes, but they seemed to be all dominated by one, immediately west of the town, which

was evidently the key of the position. Making a hasty mental note of all the details of the country, they mounted their horses and returned home by a more westerly route. On the way they observed some 20 Boers on the hill west of Maeders, but, eluding them, returned without mishap to a pass east of Kuilfontein, which was held for them by a troop of Garratt's squadron.

The success of the night march of December 31st, and of the attack on the hill subsequently known as MacCracken's was mainly due to this reconnaissance.

The objection to this form of reconnaisance was that it withdrew a number of officers who could ill be spared, besides that the condition of our horses rendered these patrols liable to be overtaken if discovered, a contingency that inevitably told against the men's confidence; and as Boer marksmanship was found less effective against a widely extended line, officers' patrols became more the exception than the practice, and were eventually replaced by the following system, which during the year 1900 became general among French's division.

Regiments of brigades took their turn to be in front, and a squadron of the advanced regiment was told off in rotation to be responsible for the scouting. The officer commanding that squadron detailed one or two troops as advanced scouts, and extended the files roughly at 100 yards apart, covering a frontage of about 2,500 yards; one troop was in support 600 to 800 yards behind the advanced scouts, the two remaining troops being 1,000 yards in rear of the support, and 1,000 to 1,500 yards in advance of the main body.

In open country this system answered well enough, except that such extended lines were too conspicuous for purposes of concealment, while hilly ground increased the difficulty of keeping touch; but its chief drawback was the additional exertion thrown upon man and horse, whenever a change of direction was necessary, and the effect it had of relaxing the intensity of individual observation, making men less self-reliant and more dependent on their neighbours.

Another method was introduced, which was found to answer better than any other, particularly in rough and undulating country. The scouting was done by small groups, each group consisting of a section of four men, with supports not more than 250 to 300 yards in the rear, each support consisting of from eight to ten men. The groups rode at intervals of about 300 yards, three men of each group riding from six to eight yards apart, and the fourth man 100 yards in front. A reserve

of 40 to 50 men in rear of the centre acted as a support. The advantages claimed for this system are (1) The confidence men experience from riding side by side and knowing they can be supported in a few minutes. (2) The scouts of the enemy's rear-guard are less likely to fire on men in this formation, or if they do they will retire as soon as supports come up, and the main body is thus likely to receive timely information. (3) In rough ground lines of men in groups can be maintained at a less expenditure of horseflesh.

It is obvious that the broad principle of scouts being numerous enough and sufficiently far from the main body to protect the front, flanks, and rear from surprise, and give timely notice of the presence of the enemy, must be observed; and that in addition to the scouts, parties should be sent out on the flanks to a distance of at least 2,000 yards from the main body.

Between February and November 1900 there were probably only two instances when the scouts failed to give the leading brigade timely warning of the proximity of the enemy. The first instance was some 25 to 30 miles west of Pretoria at Kalkheuvel in the Magaliesberg Mountains on June 3rd, and the second on the first day of the battle of Diamond Hill, when the cavalry was engaged in the flanking movement on the left of Lord Roberts's line of advance. On both these occasions much the same thing occurred. The head of the advanced brigade got close up to the scouts, the enemy opened fire at 400 or 500 yards range, and it needed cool leadership and well-disciplined troops to get out of the trap without loss of guns and life. The fact that with the exception of these two incidents the officer commanding the leading brigade never failed to receive ample notice of the enemy's presence during a period of nine months, proves that there was little fault to find with the scouting of the cavalry belonging to General French's division.

These duties put a great strain upon the junior officers as troop-leaders, as well as upon the men. Over and over again the only means of finding out if a kopje was occupied by the enemy, was to ride on until fired at from it. It was a daily occurrence for a subaltern with a few men to go out and draw fire, as it was usually called; knowing well that this would not be until they got within 400 or 500 yards of the enemy, who was probably lying so well concealed that a telescope could not detect his presence.

No part of a cavalry soldier's work requires perhaps more training and intelligence than scouting. We had no body of

men specially selected and trained as scouts in our cavalry regiments; the men merely took their duty in their turn whether they were fitted for it or not, or whatever the condition of their horses, but experience and zeal came to their aid and made them efficient. No doubt, as their critics have said, they often failed to take full advantage of cover while moving, and exposed themselves unnecessarily; but the conditions under which our pursuit took place, (and it must not be overlooked that, save for two weeks, from February to November our cavalry were practically always following a retreating enemy) made it inevitable that our scouts, when advancing over an open plain, should be visible for miles to any men of the enemy's rearguard in a position commanding the ground we were moving over.

One of the changes in our cavalry organisation should take the form of a body of men specially selected and trained as scouts in each regiment, under picked officers and mounted on picked horses, each scout being allotted in time of war two horses. These men should be extra to the fighting establishment of the regiment, and should receive an increased rate of pay; in fact they should be placed on the same footing, in that respect, as signallers will be, it is to be hoped, in the future.

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APPENDIX C

REMOUNTS IN WAR

ONE of the most important and most difficult problems the war has raised is the whole question of horsing an army in the field. It has taught us the supreme necessity for organising in peace time an efficient system for the supply of cavalry remounts. The remarks which follow are partly based upon personal observation, and largely also on the views of those who are qualified to form an authoritative opinion.

When the war broke out there was in existence only a very small and insufficient Remount Department, accustomed to deal with tens instead of thousands of animals. In ordinary times, our cavalry regiments are always kept on the "lower establishment," with half of the men dismounted. This means, that before they can be placed on a war footing, a large number of horses must be provided to fill existing gaps, or to replace those animals which may be found medically unfit. There was no reserve of horses except that formed by a very defective registration arrangement, under which private owners can register their horses for purchase in case of need. The owners are paid an annual fee of 10*s.* per horse registered, and the omnibus and tramway companies, and many of the great carrier firms, regularly derive advantage from this source of income. The prices at which these horses may be taken over, in the event of purchase, are fixed in advance and vary from £45 to £70 according to quality. If all the horses registered in this way had been found suitable, they would have been hardly sufficient to mount the cavalry alone, without any allowance being made for the mounted infantry and volunteer arms, which it was necessary to supply with horses. As a rule, these horses proved suitable rather for draught than for the saddle; and at the outset of the war they were quickly requisitioned for the artillery and ammunition columns.

The fundamental mistake in our system is that instead of reserving for ourselves the exclusive right to take over for

military purposes English and Irish horses of the proper class and to pay accordingly, we have allowed foreign Governments to deplete the supply by outbidding us, and then, on the army being called into the field, were compelled to buy inferior animals abroad. The work of providing the horses required when the South African war commenced had to be done hurriedly, and reliance had to be placed on the assistance of "purchasing officers," some of whom had probably never bought an army horse in their lives. Practical veterinary knowledge was essential, but the Army Veterinary Department had been kept so low that it was impossible even to send out as many skilled officers as were necessary for service at the front. To supply the deficiency, civil veterinary surgeons had to be engaged, both to accompany the troops and to act as advisers to the purchasing officers, who had to be sent all over the world to find horses and ship them off as quickly as possible to the seat of war. These civilians had naturally little or no knowledge of army horses and of the requirements of active service. At all events, a large number of practically useless animals, bought at high prices, were shipped from markets previously unknown, numbers and not suitability alone being the primary consideration. Many of them died before doing a day's work in the field. The purchasing, even in Great Britain, was frequently unsatisfactory in its results, and it was notably so when foreign markets had to be tapped. The demand was so urgent that there was not time to admit of due care in selection, even if the duty had been entrusted only to experienced men.

A purchasing officer should have experience of horses on active service. The ordinary knowledge of hunters, polo-ponies, and racehorses may assist him; but it falls far short of what he really requires. Almost any cavalry officer can pick out his best horses from a batch brought before him for sale, but his difficulty lies in knowing where to draw the line between suitable and unsuitable horses, which to accept and which to reject. A purchasing agent, if he is to be efficient, must not have his discretion limited, nor his work hurried, in the manner which was usual when the war began. He must not be tied down to a fixed number at a low price, and above everything he must be allowed a reasonable time. No man can buy more than at most 40 to 50 horses in a day. After looking at a certain number of animals, the eye gets tired and the whole power of judging appears to be temporarily lost. When large numbers of horses are required in a short space of time, it would be far more economical to employ a much

larger number of remount agents. It might have been expected that as time went on the purchasing officers would overcome their difficulties, but that was not entirely the case. Very little can be learnt from purchasing large numbers of horses, without seeing them at work, and noting those which prove suitable, and those which fail. The extent of their failure was probably not known to the purchasing officers themselves, for they had not the opportunity of following the horses to the Cape and seeing them at work in the field. It is astonishing how large the proportion of unfit horses imported really was. One might examine hundreds upon arrival without finding a single animal sound enough to carry a cavalry officer through a month's hard work. No doubt many of them might have done well enough if they could have rested after disembarkation and been gradually fed into condition, but they had to be immediately hastened up to the front.

The class of horse required for cavalry on active service in South Africa is a small, well-bred horse, which has been in regular hard work under the saddle and has had its muscles fully developed. These horses, if properly treated on board ship and after landing, will quickly get into condition and be capable of performing hard work on service rations. The ordinary grass-fed horse, which has never been physically developed, is not capable of hard work, but will require steady and gradually increasing work under the saddle for some months before he can be relied upon to stand the strain of carrying a fair weight day after day for any length of time. As the working horse is very difficult to obtain at a short notice and at a reasonable price, large depots should be properly organised where the grass-fed horses can be gradually got into condition and accustomed to live on corn.

The horses shipped from the United Kingdom were generally much superior to those obtained from abroad, illustrating the difference between working and grass-fed animals. Most of them had been in hard-fed condition before embarkation and displayed more stamina. This was especially noticeable in the animals secured for service with the artillery, many of which were supplied by the omnibus companies. These were carefully selected, well cared for on the voyage, and often allowed a period of rest before being put to work.

Of the horses imported from foreign countries it is impossible to say much that is good. They had generally been grass-fed, many were unshod, and all were weak and out of

condition after a long voyage. Argentine ponies being well spoken of, and their excellence for polo and other purposes having been well attested in the past, a large number of them were imported and sent to the front, chiefly into the mounted infantry. The results were disappointing. The explanation given is that the purchasing officers deliberately preferred those which were fat, and so got only those which were running at grass, being too young to work or of a quality too indifferent for ordinary use on the ranch. A large number of them were soft animals which gave in easily, and as horsemen say "had no heart." There were many of them in the ranks of the 10th Hussars, and in this particular instance, although they were slow and frequently hard to break, they stood work well, which is attributable to the fact that the regiment had the good fortune to make an early selection at Stellenbosch, and were thus able to get a certain amount of condition on the animals before taking them into the field. The Australian horses showed signs of quality, but were mostly deficient in weight-carrying power. The American importations, many of which showed a strain of Clydesdale blood, were short-necked and straight-shouldered, and therefore unfitted for work under the saddle; they were awkward to ride and nearly helpless in rough or broken ground. The Canadian variety proved more suitable, being better topped than those from the States, but, like them, suffered severely from bad treatment and want of condition; if they had been given time they would probably have done useful work. The country-bred Bombay ponies brought in large numbers from India were totally unfit for cavalry work, yet they were issued in numbers to our men at Paardeberg, in the majority of cases on the day before the march to Bloemfontein began. India has to import horses to mount her British cavalry regiments, and to some extent her Native cavalry. Yet some cavalry officers at Paardeberg pronounced the Indian ponies to be the best remounts hitherto imported; the explanation may be that they had been worked before being shipped. Weak, in wretched condition, many of them unshod or lame, they could add but little to the mobility of French's division. The Hungarian horses were even worse, and it is not easy to understand why they were chosen, seeing that they had proved a failure in England and Egypt on more than one occasion, under conditions much more favourable to them than existed in South Africa. These horses might, after being brought into condition, well groomed and properly broken, have done light work in a victoria or phaeton in London; but as hard

useful horses for an army in the field it did not require much judgment to condemn them at once. Out of the large number issued to the cavalry the majority had died or been sent into the veterinary hospitals after a week's hard work.

For draught purposes in the artillery there was nothing to compare with the English horse, although one battery from India did well with their Walers.

So much for the raw material. But what of the treatment to which the horses were subjected, especially in the earlier stages of the campaign? Reduced to debility by a long sea voyage, they were at once crowded into open trucks without any fittings, and sent up to the front. On the journey, always a matter of several days, they might be short of food or altogether unfed and unwatered. There were instances of horses being knocked off their legs and trampled to death by careless shunting and handling of the trains. Usually the journey was performed in the shoes worn on board ship, and often they were unshod.

Facilities for shoeing were rare, especially as regards animals smaller than the English type. The shoes carried by all cavalry regiments were meant for horses bigger than the remounts with which they were usually supplied. Shoes had therefore to be made on the spot—when it could be done, which was not always nor often—and this took the farriers away from veterinary duty, to say nothing of the fact that they were frequently in the fighting ranks alongside of the ordinary trooper. It is clearly necessary to organise a farrier corps not expected to ride in the ranks, but strictly confined to the important work of looking after the horses. The difficulty of shoeing the smaller remounts being sometimes insuperable, lameness and footsores supervened upon the march. At Paardeberg remounts arrived with their feet in this state, and were issued the afternoon before the force marched for Bloemfontein. A large number were footsore when issued, and there were no shoes to fit the majority, even if there had been time to shoe them. Owing to this, a large number became lame and had to be abandoned on the veldt. At Bloemfontein the remount arrangements were equally unsatisfactory. It was at first found impossible to send the animals the whole way by rail to Bloemfontein, and they had to be driven some miles along the road. Mobs of horses and mules were daily to be seen being driven into the town with hardly a sound beast among them. They were turned into kraals often fetlock-deep in mud, with no arrangements for feeding, hay and grain being thrown on

to the ground, and the poor brutes being allowed to scramble for it.

To add to all this, strangles, catarrhal fever, and glanders broke out among them. There was little time to do anything to relieve the sufferers, and they had to be issued as they were, sick, footsore, unshod. Owing to want of proper organisation and training the waste of animal life was very great. The regiments were compelled to accept the animals issued to them; the Remount Department accounted for the issue of a certain number of remounts, and the cavalry were blamed for having lost them or rendered them inefficient from neglect. After a time the arrangements improved slightly, but they were never really efficient during the whole of the advance to Pretoria and on to Barberton.

On active service horses require food which they can easily digest, and on which they are able to live. The present system of giving horses a ration composed entirely of whole oats, even when such a ration is a fairly liberal one and the oats are of good quality, is not economical. It is well known to all practical horsemen that horses cannot live for any length of time on oats alone, but require these to be augmented by some more bulky form of food in order to allow digestion to be carried on satisfactorily. During the beginning of the campaign the horses were supplied chiefly with oats, and were only on rare occasions given compressed hay forage, consisting of chaffed oats, hay, and crushed oats. The supply of this compressed forage was not equal to the demand, and it was issued at equal weight, pound for pound, with oats. Of course its nutritive ratio was far below that of oats, and it should have been given at a much higher scale of equivalent; but even as issued pound for pound in lieu of oats it was far more valuable for the weak, overworked animals than the whole-grain ration. The horses could digest it and were not able to swallow it without mastication when hungry. The half-starved horses frequently bolted the ration of whole oats, and consequently derived little benefit from the grain. If any proof of this was required beyond the emaciated condition of the animals, one had only to visit the sites of bivouacs some weeks after they had been vacated, when they were found covered with a luxuriant crop of oats. Unfortunately the supply of oat hay was very irregular, and it was rarely, especially in the Orange Free State, found in quantities sufficient to feed the whole division, and consequently grazing had to be relied upon to supply the bulky food. Away from standing camps hay was not issued, and

bulk had to be made up by grazing, or by dry oat hay found on farms. It is only during about two months of the year that the veldt grass is suitable for feeding any horse except the Colonial pony, which is accustomed to live upon it. During the early spring the young grass contains little nutriment, and proves a laxative to working animals. It very quickly ripens, and after the seeds have fallen, the bent consists of little but wood fibre. This dry grass, with whole unmasticated oats, is very indigestible, and gives rise to irritation of the stomach, and frequently to diarrhœa, which quickly weakens working horses. If this food is continued for any length of time, imported horses begin to suffer from chronic dyspepsia, and a disease known to veterinary science as miecoenteritis. They rapidly lose condition, become so emaciated that they are entirely incapable of performing hard work, and eventually have to be abandoned or die.

The oats supplied were frequently of very inferior quality, being often very light, and in many instances musty. It was useless to reject them when issued at the front, as there was nothing else to fall back upon, and inferior oats, if sound, are always better than none at all. In standing camps hay was issued, and occasionally bran. The English hay was generally good, but a considerable quantity of the foreign hay was totally unfit for food, whole trusses being mouldy. To this mouldy hay a considerable number of cases of paralysis among the horses were attributable, especially round Bloemfontein, during April 1900.

Compressed forage made up of good chaffed hay and crushed grain in suitable proportions is the best travel-ration for horses, being food which they can easily digest, and which will at the same time provide sufficient bulk to enable them to assimilate the grain. As has already been pointed out, horses cannot digest a ration composed entirely of grain, and the dry veldt grass is only suitable to provide the necessary bulk during a very short period of the year. It is during this period in South Africa that horse-sickness appears; and there can be little doubt that grazing on certain lands is a fruitful cause of this disease. It is absolutely useless, when troops are only given a ration of from nine to ten pounds of oats daily, to issue orders that during certain months grazing is to be restricted, in order to prevent horse-sickness. It is better for the poor brutes to die of horse-sickness, usually a rapid form of death, than to succumb to a process of slow starvation. The amount of oat hay that could be obtained locally was very limited, and the expedient

of grazing the horses had to be resorted to when possible. But the difficulties in grazing were numerous. There are, as I have already said, only two months in the year when the veldt grass is suitable for any horses but the Colonial pony: the enemy frequently burnt the veldt, especially in the later stages of the war; the young grass in the spring affords but little nourishment, and is laxative and debilitating; and finally, our system of grazing, when grass could be got, was not always a good one.

The circular issued with Army Orders, in September 1900, laying down precautions to be taken against horse-sickness, was, under existing conditions, impracticable. The quantity of food required for horses in hard work is from 15 to 20 pounds daily at the least. Troop-horses in England, standing in stables and working on an average one hour a day, and that usually under a stripped saddle, are allowed 22 pounds a day, and if they are taken on manœuvres this ration is always considerably increased. On active service in a foreign country, the same horses are expected to live on from 8 to 12 pounds of food, and frequently be under the saddle from 48 to 60 hours at a time. It must be remembered that on this starvation diet these horses have to work all day and every day, carrying a service kit in addition to their own rations, and the man's rations with his ammunition. Frequently these animals' rations had to be reduced, and this always towards the end of a long march when the horses were in a very poor condition and really required extra food.

On the morning of February 15th, when the cavalry made the dash to Kimberley, and after the horses had been performing hard work for four days, grain was served out to the regiments to be carried on horses. At that time very few regiments had been supplied with corn-bags, and the only means of carrying the grain was in the nose-bags and in the wallets. The nose-bag if too full is very liable to be lost, owing to the strap which fastens it to the saddle breaking, and this happened on several occasions during February 15th. An attempt was made to carry some of the grain, which could not be carried on the cavalry-horse, on pack-horses, in the sacks in which it was issued lashed on to the regimental saddles. Spare horses were scarce, and only a very small quantity could be carried in this way, and most of the horses used for the purpose, which naturally were not the best in the division, dropped exhausted before they reached Kimberley. The greater part of the grain issued on that morning was either left on the camping-ground or on the road to Kimber-

ley, and the horses had to exist on what the men had in their nose-bags and wallets for four days and a half, from February 15th to midday on the 19th. During this time the troops were constantly in action, and made two forced marches. Is it to be wondered at that the animals lost condition and died?

When Broadwood's brigade came up to its wagons on the 19th, the horses went nearly mad when they heard the corn being served out, and it was necessary to put the bits into their mouths in order to enable the men to hold them. These poor starving brutes had to be fed on oats, and no sooner had they eaten their food than they had to be taken out on a reconnaissance, only returning to bivouac after dark. To mend matters, at Paardeberg the grain rations were cut down to four pounds a day, and it was decided that the cavalry at Koedoesrand Drift were to exist on this and grazing. Needless to say the enormous number of animals soon destroyed all the veldt, which at its best only consisted of dry seeded grass. This went on until the force marched on Bloemfontein. The reason given was that a large convoy had been captured by the enemy which contained all the grain. From February 20th to March 7th the horses remained on this starvation ration, and then it was found that, from an excess of caution, large quantities of oats had accumulated at Paardeberg, above what could be carried by the transport, and this large supply had eventually to be burnt to prevent its falling into the hands of the enemy. In this way our trained and good English horses were lost, and for the rest of the campaign the three brigades, which then composed the cavalry division, had to do their best with the wretched brutes supplied by the Remount Department.

The waste of horses in the three cavalry brigades between the time they left Modder River, on February 15th, and February 27th, when they reached Paardeberg, was 1,474.

The difficulty of obtaining a sufficient supply of nose-bags was frequently felt, and at the beginning of the campaign many of those supplied were not of good pattern, though later on there was a great improvement in this respect. If one has not had practical experience in the field one has not any idea for how short a time a nose-bag remains serviceable. Ignoring this difficulty, an order was published directing that nose-bags sprinkled with a weak solution of carbolic acid or creosote should be worn by horses all night as a preventive against horse-sickness. If this order had been conscientiously obeyed, in a very short time our mounted troops would have

been entirely without what is often the most necessary article of a mounted man's equipment.

The arrangements for watering the horses were no better than the arrangements for feeding them. In a hot climate horses require water at frequent intervals if they are performing hard work in the sun on dry food. In much of the country which was the scene of operations, water is always scarce, but where it existed the most was not made of it. During the march to Kimberley the horses had to go from two in the morning of the 17th to three in the afternoon without water, under a burning sun; and on the following two days they fared little better. On the 15th they had to go dry until Kimberley was reached. In this case the deprivation was unavoidable; but later in the campaign opportunities of allowing the animals to drink were frequently neglected, and when they were sent to the water the supervision was slack.

In order to spare fatigue to the horses it has been suggested that the men should dismount at every halt, and lead them oftener when on the march. A more effective relief would be the introduction of a lighter form of saddlery, and of some system whereby all or the greater part of the kit, now placed on the troop-horse, could be carried on pack animals or in light carts. Even when the trooper has dismounted a dead weight of several stone is left on the horses, and it is this incessant pressure which more than anything else causes sore backs and other troubles. If animals could be unsaddled every two or three hours, even if only for half an hour, they would suffer far less fatigue from a long march, and their backs would be far less liable to injury. With the present equipment the process of unsaddling is a very difficult and tedious one, it being two men's work to lift the present packed saddle, and time being also needed to adjust the blanket, numnah, etc., commanding officers can hardly be expected to run the risk, even during a prolonged halt, if there is any chance of the enemy appearing. Accepted authority in Europe is against the practice of unsaddling on the march, as it endangers the horse to tender back and cold; but in the dry air of South Africa and Australia there would be no such dangers.

The equipment of our cavalry raises one of the most important military questions of the day. There is no doubt that it needs entire remodelling. The Boer has shown us what can be done with small inferior horses if in good trim and not overweighted. What the Boer can accomplish on

his inferior pony our cavalry can also do, but they must dispense with the enormous kit they now carry and accept a more simple saddle. Our present saddle is unnecessarily heavy in order to carry the weight which our mounted men ride on active service. It has a blanket and numnah which require a careful adjustment, a breastplate which is only required on horses of exceptional conformation, a girth, and a surcingle. As has already been stated it takes two men to lift this saddle when packed on the horse's back. The blanket must be most carefully folded, the numnah adjusted, breastplate, girths, and surcingle buckled up, and sword and carbine put in their places. With this saddle the most important thing is the blanket and how it is folded; being loose it can be easily lost, and then the saddle becomes useless. Practical horsemen have frequently been heard to say with much truth, that at present the efficiency of our cavalry soldier depends on a four shilling blanket. In some particulars the weight carried by a cavalry mount has been increased in recent years, and in this campaign the lightest of our troopers rode, in full marching order, at least 18 or 19 stone, a weight which would be regarded as absolutely prohibitive in the hunting-field. Yet the horses were expected to do a much harder day's work than is thrown upon the average hunter, and to repeat the performance indefinitely without rest or sufficient rations. Heavy and cumbrous as our equipment is, it was more serviceable than the saddle issued in its place during the campaign. Probably the American and Austrian patterns were sent out because our own make could not be supplied quickly enough. The worst feature of the British pattern, apart from its excessive weight, is that the horse's comfort depends on the careful and accurate folding of the blanket underneath it. Careless folding produces sore back; if the blanket be lost, the saddle, not having stuffed panels, cannot be used at all. But with all its drawbacks, the men were accustomed to it, and they could not readily adapt themselves to the straight-legged seat necessitated by the American MacClellan saddle, which besides was much too narrow in the withers, and a prolific cause of sore back. The Colonial saddle of the English pattern with stuffed knee-pads is infinitely preferable. After the arrival of the army at Bloemfontein, a circular was issued from Headquarters which, after pointing out the various ways in which the blanket might be folded, went on to say that the arch of the saddle might be raised by placing layers of straw between the blanket folds, or by tying straw bottle-jackets on to the saddle-bars. The

first expedient would have done more harm than good, as the straw would quickly have pulverised and sagged down to the bottom of the blanket; the other suggestion must have appeared a poor joke to men who had been living on scanty rations where such articles as bottle-jackets were unknown. The saddles as issued by the Ordnance Department, were usually of hard and dry leather, a fault which could not well be remedied in a country where grease was most difficult to obtain; and when it could be found there was rarely time to thoroughly soften the leather before taking the field. The results were unfortunate to both horses and riders. The staff of saddlers, especially with the Colonial and Irregular troops, was also insufficient to carry out minor repairs in the field.

What appears to be required for our cavalry is an equipment on the lines of that used by the Boers. Before accepting any pattern of saddle the weight it has to carry must be decided. If a weight of 20 stone is to be borne by a saddle, a totally different pattern will be needed from what would be accepted when only 14 or 15 stone is to be placed upon it. If the weight which our cavalry ride is reduced, and reduced it must be, then there is no better saddle than a well made English saddle of the Colonial pattern without a breastplate. The panels should be made of leather stuffed with horse-hair and not flock, and under the saddle a properly folded blanket may be worn, but the saddle should fit the horse so that it can be used without the blanket. The present practice of wearing a numnah is a mistake when one has a lot of men to mount who are wanting in experience, as unless the numnah is very carefully strapped up, it is very likely to gall the animal's withers and rub the skin over the spines of the loin vertebrae. A large number of the Colonial saddles, especially those supplied to the Irregular troops, were of very inferior quality. Some were made to a great extent of paper covered with thin leather, and in the majority the D's for carrying the carbine or rifle-bucket, nose-bag, &c., were so weak and insecurely fastened to the tree that they were practically useless. In a large number of saddles of this pattern issued, the D's for holding the rear pack were too few in number and not so placed as to allow the baggage-straps to be properly adjusted; while others had the fans too short to support the rear pack, which consequently pressed on the horse's loins. In many instances, again, the panels were carried too high up into the arch and consequently pressed on the top of the animal's withers. Frequently the wallets were fastened to the saddle in far too perpendicular

a position, not sloping sufficiently downward and forward to be away from the rider's thighs, and in a large number of instances the stirrups were too narrow for the men's wide-soled ammunition-boots. The English cavalry saddle was well made but too heavy, and having no panels the wooden side-bars injured the animals' backs. The Indian cavalry saddle, with steel side-bars and numnah-panels, was far better; the latter gripped the blanket and prevented it from slipping out of position, and the steel side-bars seemed to allow a certain amount of elasticity. At Pretoria a large number of MacClellan saddles were issued to the cavalry with the Hungarian remounts. These saddles are highly spoken of by men who have had experience of them in the American army; but they were issued to regiments who had never even seen them before, and were too narrow in the arch for the horses for which they were supplied. In addition to kits, accoutrements required to be modified so as to be carried on them and the men taught to ride with a totally different seat from that they had learned on the ordinary English saddle. It was impossible to accomplish all this in the very short time allowed before the division was ordered to take the field again, and even if the saddles had fitted the horses there is no doubt they would have proved a failure. As it was they caused a large number of sore backs. After a two days' march many horses had to be sent into Springs, the majority suffering from very severe saddle injuries; and after the division arrived at Middleburg, and during the time it held the advance line at Wonderfontein on the Komati Poort railway, the number of animals admitted to the veterinary hospital suffering from such injuries was considerable. Eventually, so far as possible, all these saddles were discarded when the force advanced to Belfast, but not before the experiment had caused a very considerable loss in horseflesh and much needless suffering.

The Australian saddles supplied to the mounted infantry were of very inferior quality and totally unsuited for carrying the kit of a mounted man under service conditions. The cow-boy saddles from Canada were very successful in spite of their weight; the men were accustomed to ride on them and thoroughly understood their use. A saddle of an Austrian pattern supplied to some of the Imperial Yeomanry companies was found a failure, and was soon discarded. The Colonial saddle with stuffed panels has been advocated. The necessity of properly stuffed panels is found when horses lose condition owing to hard continuous work on

service rations. The whole of the back muscles waste, and it will soon be found that the angle of the ribs is covered by little else than skin. The hard wooden side-bar of the cavalry saddle, resting on an inelastic blanket and numnah, often nips the skin against the ribs and causes sore backs by checking the circulation; properly stuffed panels afford sufficient elasticity to frequently mitigate this. The great preventive of sore backs is to cause men to march leading their horses. It has been found in this war that cavalry have to do the greater part of the actual fighting on foot, and there is no doubt that in peace time they should be trained to march in much the same way as infantry, and the whole of their dismounted drills should not be confined to short foot parades in a barrack-yard. Under our present training a cavalry soldier sits on his horse and looks upon marching on foot as something derogatory. Colonial troopers were frequently seen walking and leading their ponies, and, among tribes such as the Arabs, the horse to be used in action is as a rule led until contact with the enemy takes place. To enable men leading their horses to mount quickly, it is essential that the enormous rear pack at present carried should be reduced as much as possible.

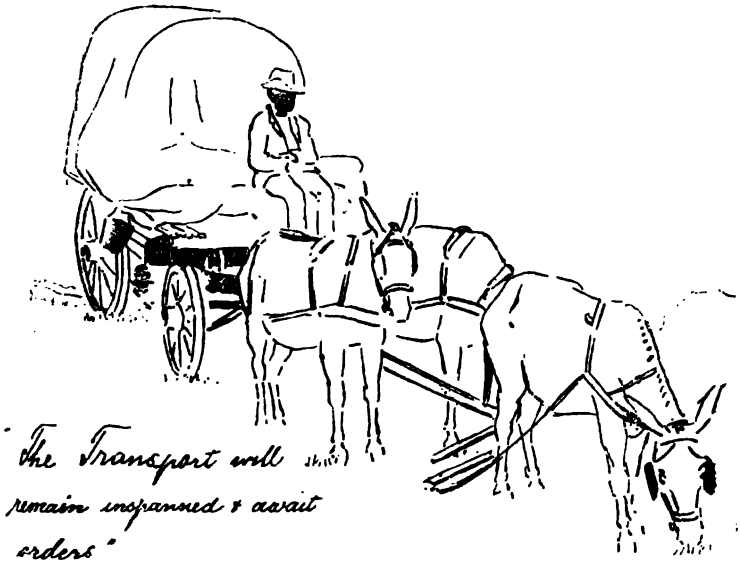
With reference to the actual kit to be carried by the cavalry or mounted infantry, it should be pointed out how little the ordinary foot-soldier requires, and our mounted men really require very little more. The present cloak, which becomes very heavy when thoroughly wet, might be replaced by a macintosh. This, with the blanket carried under the saddle, the short, thick serge overcoat (known as a "coat British warm" in the clothing department), a thick woollen jersey, and a woollen sleeping-cap is really all a man requires when lying out at night, and is all the clothing a cavalry soldier should carry on his saddle; his change of clothing, &c., should be carried on wheels. In addition to his clothes a mounted man should carry a picketing-peg, nose-bag, mess-tin, hoop-pick, his arms and day's rations on his saddle, and on his body his water-bottle and ammunition. He should have a corn-sack in order to enable him to carry extra forage for his horse when absolutely necessary, but this should only be used on occasions when he has to leave his wagons. Every cavalryman should be supplied with a good pair of field-glasses, but he should be encouraged to use them only when absolutely necessary. It is wonderful how the constant use of glasses limits the vision of the naked eye, and quickness in recognising distant objects is one of the most important

faculties a scout requires, especially in an open country such as that of the South African veldt.

The inadequate provision for treating sick horses is another matter to which attention should be directed. There was seldom any means of equipping veterinary hospitals even in the simplest manner, nor was there any trained subordinate staff to carry out veterinary treatment. The farriers had enough to do in keeping the horses of their units shod, and, even if they could spare the time, they were hardly the persons to whom the dressing of sores should be entrusted, as they might be doing this directly after handling a dirty hoof. The dressers in a veterinary hospital require to be as clean and skilful as those in an ordinary hospital. Veterinary dispensers were equally necessary, and were also wanting. A veterinary hospital, perhaps on the Indian model, with a properly qualified staff, should be attached to each brigade, and equipped for the treatment of say 250 horses. At these hospitals a number of sound horses could be kept as well as horses recovering from illness, and these could be issued in place of those brought in for treatment. Whenever practicable, the more serious cases should be drafted down to the nearest railway-stations, to be sent to the stationary veterinary hospitals and fit horses brought back in their places. In this way horses would be at once relieved from work, when unfit, and would not be worked to death as they are at present. And many horses unfit for work in one branch of the service might be utilised in another, as for instance, horses whose backs had been injured by the saddle in cavalry regiments might be sent for draught-work into the artillery or transport; such a system would have simplified many of our difficulties in the campaign. On the march from the Modder to Barberton seven veterinary hospitals were opened, but the meagreness of their equipment greatly limited their usefulness. Rope for tying the animals had to be purchased locally; pegs had to be made by our farriers, and veterinary officers with medical and surgical equipment taken from one or other of the different units. Trained attendants there were practically none. All the farriers were required to shoe the fit horses and remounts, and only one or two could be spared to look after the sick animals. Consequently veterinary officers had to train their assistants in the midst of the greatest pressure of work.

If properly equipped veterinary hospitals had accompanied the force during the whole war, a large percentage of the

animals which had to be abandoned would have been saved, and the waste of horses would have been reduced to probably one half. Every imported English horse saved or kept in a condition to work double the average length of time animals lasted in the ranks, would have meant a saving to the country of something like £100, and it would have taken very few such animals to have covered the small expense of a properly organised veterinary department. In India, our numerous frontier wars have taught us the necessity of organising veterinary hospitals with a special subordinate staff, and it was on these hospitals we had to fall back for the treatment of the greater number of our sick animals during the present war. Unfortunately, the number of these hospitals brought over from India was far too small, and consequently they had all to be used as enormous base veterinary hospitals, and veterinary officers in the field had to rely on the antiquated farrier-assistant, and whatever equipment he could procure locally. The whole of our veterinary service, in short, appears from the experience gained in this war, to require putting on a sounder and more scientific basis.



APPENDIX D

NOTES ON TRANSPORT

IN the South African war the importance of the transport has been strongly brought home to us. Accepted methods had to give way to a system that seemed better adapted to the limited resources alone available to the army. By looking into the deficiencies and difficulties that presented themselves, and by comparing the methods adopted, a way may be found by which they can be obviated or overcome in the future.

The mobility of an army in the field is to a very great extent dependent on the organisation of its transport service. When a country in which civilisation has attained a high standard is invaded, the natural resources can be drawn upon in case of need to meet any temporary shortcomings. South Africa offers no such facilities, and no plan of campaign which had not taken into account this factor could claim credit for foresight. The outbreak of hostilities found the army in a state of unpreparedness, and a scramble for animals of draught, wagons, conveyances, and trained drivers was a necessary sequel. To evolve an effective service out of the varied elements which the exigencies of the moment had brought together, required time and labour that could ill be

spared by the generals at the front, who had to bear the brunt of the early months of the war. Not until the arrival of Lord Roberts, when the operations on all sides had been reduced to stale-mate, could the question be approached with that energy and circumspection which the importance of the matter required, and which neglect in the past had rendered so much more complicated. Even then the difficulties were enormous, and it is necessary to dwell on a few points to show the nature of the obstacles which had to be overcome. In the first place, provision had to be made for the feeding, supplying with ammunition, hospital stores, &c., of a force very much larger than the military authorities in England had ever considered would be necessary. Secondly, the army was operating in a country poorly supplied with railways of narrow guage (climbing many severe gradients) and insufficiently equipped with rolling-stock. Again, once away from the railways the country was practically roadless, as roads are understood in England, and the track invariably led across many dongas or rivers only to be crossed in favourable circumstances at drifts the approaches to which were usually very steep and difficult. Then the supply of trained animals and trained drivers was limited, and the ox and the mule, on whom the brunt of the work necessarily fell, could neither be worked nor fed under similar conditions; the ox requires to be fed and rested in the day, working best in the night, while in the case of the mule, the position is entirely reversed. The popular error that the veldt would provide all the necessary pasturage for the animals was only exploded after a costly experience. To a certain extent the grazing afforded by the country supplemented the supply of fodder that could conveniently be carried, but as the same roads had to be traversed over and over again, the supply became more and more scanty, until nothing was left for the animals unless new areas, too far from the line of march to be practicable, were called into requisition. In the winter months the grass on the veldt dries up entirely, and the animals become solely dependent on the fodder carried in the train. The water question was even more serious. Animals which are worked over bad roads with heavy loads under a burning sun for long periods at a time must drink or die, and the sufferings of the transport-cattle from want of water were sometimes terrible. When General French was marching to Kimberley, the mules of the Divisional Transport were in a terrible plight when they arrived at the Modder. Their neighs and cries as they smelt the water, which they appeared to do several miles

before they reached the river, were piteous in the extreme and where a drift had to be crossed, the greatest confusion and delay was often due to the thirst of the mules. As the wagons entered the drift, the mules, careless of the width and oblivious of everything but that they were thirsty and water was at their feet, would stop to drink, thus blocking the passage while those in the rear would become almost frantic in their efforts to get at the water. Where possible the mules at the rear wagons would be allowed to drink while the leading wagons were being passed over, but owing to the steepness of the river banks this was often impracticable.

Such were some of the difficulties which served to hamper the mobility of the forces to a very considerable extent.

The system of supply adopted in the beginning of the war was that which is known as the Regimental or War Office System. Under this system to every unit of the force there was allotted a number of wagons and carts and draught animals under the supervision of its regimental transport officer. These were sub-divided into two lines, the first of which accompanied the fighting troops, while the second line carried regimental baggage and stores for two to three days. The next link with the main supply park consisted of transport companies under officers of the Army Service Corps, which furnished supply columns for the different forces. They brought up supplies, either from the depots on the railway or from the ox-park, to the forces to which they were attached. The regimental wagons were supplied from these columns, which returned when empty to be refilled at the depots or ox-park.

The officers of the Army Service Corps were responsible for the transport of the columns and of the ox-park, as well as for the supply arrangements of the force to which they belonged. The senior Army Service Corps officer of the brigade supply column was responsible to the brigadier for all the transport held by units, and was usually the baggage-master on the line of march. The advantage claimed for this system is that the regimental officer in charge of transport will strain every nerve to keep his unit well provided, and in order to achieve this will understand the necessity of taking every care of the animals under his charge, making a study of their peculiarities and paying special attention to questions of food, water, and rest. This would make for both efficiency and economy.

At the commencement of the war the scale of transport laid down in the Field Army Establishment and the system

of supplying an army with transport as set forth in the official text-books was more or less successfully followed in Natal, and with the approval of Lord Methuen as far as Modder River, where he reported well on the system, except that he considered it insufficient to enable him to make a detour from the railway.

Up to that time the wide movement away from the railway (which was the source of supply) was not contemplated, nor was the transport as then organized in any way sufficient to carry out such a scheme. Moreover, the regimental system, though theoretically excellent, was in practice attended with grave objections, the chief defect perhaps being that it locked up a quantity of transport for the service of regiments which were possibly halted on garrison duty, thereby reducing the amount of transport available for the army as a whole. This defect was considered of such consequence as to outweigh all the advantages of the system, and on his arrival, Lord Kitchener at once set about organizing a new Departmental System which would remedy this flaw and would better adapt itself to the peculiar necessities of the South African campaign.

The main idea was to collect all the transport stock and form the service into companies under special transport officers; and these companies were told off to accompany the forces in the field on the basis of a certain number of wagons to each force in proportion to its strength, and could at will be transferred from one force to another according to the requirements of the moment. This system at once gave greater elasticity to the operations, and enabled them to be conducted in districts away from the railway. Each company was made up of 49 mule-wagons, a Scotch cart, and one water-cart, this number of vehicles sufficing to carry the baggage with two days' supplies of food and forage for a cavalry brigade of three regiments or an infantry brigade of four battalions.

This system differed from the regimental system in that units were not supplied with permanent transport under the regimental transport officer, but received it on a fixed scale for different marches, while the regimental transport officer was responsible only for his first line of transport, viz., ammunition-carts, water-carts, and pack-animals. The whole of the transport of a brigade or force was under the direct orders of the brigade transport officer, who had complete control, and who, when the force halted, collected all transport to his own lines. At the same time supply columns were

formed as a connecting link between the railway or supply park sufficient to carry four days' forage and rations for the force. Thus the chain of supply was as follows:—

Base.
|
Railway.
|
Advanced Depot.
|
Supply Park (eight days' supplies).
|
Supply Columns (four days' supplies).
|
Wagons with Force (two days' supplies).
|
Haversack and Soldier (current day's rations).

When General French organized the cavalry into a division of three brigades at Modder River, the new transport companies had just been formed, and a certain number of them were handed over to this division. Some of these were distributed through the various regiments for their regimental transport, the remainder furnishing the supply column of the force. The system worked smoothly as long as the division remained together. At Poplar Grove, however, the brigades split up, and a separate supply column for the divisional transport had to be improvised for each brigade out of any wagons that were available, irrespective of the company to which they belonged. Moreover, between Modder River and Bloemfontein various mounted corps had been attached to and detached from the cavalry division, and the transport that accompanied them belonged to various companies; the result was that, by the time Bloemfontein was reached, there was a hopeless state of confusion among the wagons of the different companies.

During the long halt at Bloemfontein the transport was re-arranged. One idea was to give to the cavalry a larger number of wagons to enable four days' supplies to be carried instead of two, and thus give the cavalry greater freedom of action for more extensive movements. To each brigade was allotted a mule transport company. This company formed the second line of transport, and the supply column of the brigade. In addition to the transport of the brigade, one company was raised and allotted to the cavalry division to form its divisional supply column. This company was not ready when General French started northwards, but caught up his force at Kroonstad. It practically formed an additional

link in the chain of supply between the brigade supply columns and the ox-park, or rail-head, and helped the cavalry to maintain a rapid advance. At the Vaal River, where Lord Roberts was effecting the crossing into the Transvaal, the opportune arrival and timely diversion of this divisional transport from the cavalry to army headquarters at Vereeniging, prevented a delay of at least twenty-four hours, inasmuch as the ox-park had, owing to a breakdown on the line at Roodeval, been unable to come up in time. Until Pretoria was reached, the cavalry had always been accompanied by a mule transport. After Pretoria, the brigade supply columns were strengthened by absorption of the wagons of the divisional transport, the divisional mule transport, as such, ceasing to exist. Its place was taken later on by ox transport, which travelled with General French from Machadodorp to Barberton, and from Machadodorp later on to Heidelberg and Pretoria.

A short account of one section, that of the cavalry transport between Modder River and Bloemfontein, chosen from the mass of detail appertaining to the work of the transport on active service, will help to form an impression of the vast organization required to maintain a full strength and impetus in smooth working order, and the resource and unfailing energy needed to meet the unforeseen contingencies and checks for ever occurring.

During the night of February 10th, the transport of the cavalry division was assembled south of the camp at Modder River to the number of about 160 vehicles, and started at four in the morning for Ramdam, 22 miles across country, heavily loaded, with only one muddy pool to water at, and one and a half miles of uphill work through heavy sand at the end of a hot day. The following morning more wagons joined the column, increasing them to about 220, and took as much as an hour and three-quarters, moving on a front of one wagon, to get clear of its camping-ground, the head of the column only managing to reach De Kiel's Drift, at the Riet River, shortly after noon on the following day.

The crossing of the Riet River was the next difficulty, and here, owing to the heavy sand and steep banks, single teams were found to be quite insufficient, and artillery horses had to be brought up to assist; to hasten on the passage a portion of the cavalry transport was sent to Waterval Drift, five miles to the west, teams of oxen from the ox-park being lent them to help the mules, but in spite of these expedients, by dusk some 40 wagons were still on the southern bank. By ten in

the evening most of the transport was assembled about two miles north of the river, and after waiting in vain for the remaining wagons to come up, the column moved on soon after midnight, starting on a front of nine wagons, which during the night narrowed down to six, but favoured by a good moon and open ground, except for wire fences, the formation was well maintained. Short stops to close up, and one of two hours and a half, were the only halts during a march of 28 miles in 17 hours without a drop of water; in the overpowering sun, over rolling sand-dunes, the men and animals reached Klip Drift at Modder River at half-past five in the evening tired out and parched. But rest was not theirs yet, and although many of the Army Service Corps transport and supply officers had less than 12 hours' sleep between Modder River station and Klip Drift, they continued on duty, issuing that same night supplies to the troops that they might be ready to start at a moment's notice for Kimberley, which was to be the turning-point of the campaign.

In the advance on Bloemfontein, sections of the ox-park worked between the Kimberley railway and the main army, some north, some south of the Modder River; but the regular flow of supplies was seriously interrupted by the capture of 200 wagons of the supply park at Waterval Drift on February 15th. Although the loss was somewhat alleviated by annexing 60 wagons of supplies abandoned by the Boers, which were brought in by the cavalry division transport, the troops and animals at Paardeberg were put on short rations. By the time they left Osfontein, however, the mule supply columns were empty and had to wait for the ox convoys to come up; refilling from them, they pushed on to catch up the cavalry division. This entailed forced marches for the supply columns, and a heavy strain on the mules; for starting some miles in rear of the whole army, they had to push on to the very front, overtaking and passing all the slow-moving vehicles which, being in possession of the road, forced the columns to travel off the track.

From Osfontein some of the mule wagons had to go back 10 miles on the southern bank to get supplies, which meant adding 20 miles to the journey. Others had to get their supplies across the river at night, from a convoy that had come up very late from Kimberley. As the only means of passing the stores over the flooded Modder River was by a pontoon, which was on the other side of the river and not accessible, an officer swam across and established the necessary

communication. Notwithstanding this delay, the supply columns caught up the cavalry at Poplar Grove, and filled up the regimental wagons.

Similar delays and forced marches occurred after Poplar Grove and Venter's Vlei. As loaded mule wagons can seldom keep up a rate of more than two miles and a half an hour, and as a certain distance had to be covered daily, men and mules got but little time for rest. The overstrain told, among others, on the native drivers, who, when not actually on the march, had to shift loads at all hours of the day and night. They would occasionally drop off asleep on their boxes on the night march, and their mules would stray off the road and begin to graze. This would check all the wagons in the rear, and cause a gap which would pass unnoticed in the dark unless the whole column were constantly patrolled. On a veldt road, which is easily missed in the dark, such a break was apt to be serious, as, losing touch with the front portion of the column, the rear was liable to go astray.

The South African war has shown us the deficiencies in our transport and supply service, and the necessity for providing in peace time a good working system and one that can adjust itself on the outbreak of hostilities to the emergencies and peculiar conditions that may accompany them at the seat of war.

It is not to be inferred that a complete transport should be maintained at home suitable to all countries such as Egypt, West Africa, and South Africa, where the camel, carrier, and ox are the various modes of transport. To keep up an establishment of wagons and horses at home that would be unsuitable to the particular requirements, say, of South Africa, as we have seen, would be unpractical; but we should prepare ourselves with a nucleus of machinery, which, when necessary, can be expanded to meet all requirements.

We have often heard that no special qualification or training is needed for the working of transport; whereas to successfully organize and command transport a man must have been practically educated to the work, and should not be pressed into it unawares and ignorant of his business, as was so often the case during the Boer war, in which case he must almost inevitably gain his experience at the cost of his animals and with discomfort to his forces.

Again, it is essential that the system should work with an agreement of interests to one common end, devoid of those conflicting elements which the departmental system called

into being, when we found, for instance, that though the supply of food was well maintained, there was friction between the brigade transport officer and the brigade supply officer, the former naturally first looking to the efficiency of his transport, while the latter was baulked in getting supplies up and obtaining the wagons he required.

This brings us to the first and great lesson to be learnt from the war, that the supply and transport should on no account be separated, and further that these two branches should be controlled by officers of the same corps, both working for the honour and reputation of that corps.

With regard to the vehicles and animals used for transport, the South African campaign has clearly shown that the animals and vehicles of the country are the best. Climate affects the constitution of animals as well as that of men, and also affects the seasoning of wood; consequently common-sense points out that old-established countries will not use animals or vehicles which do not suit their particular country. Transport officers with any experience and knowledge universally recommended the local mule and ox wagon as well as the Colonial mule and ox.

Wagons and Carts.—The vehicles used for the purpose of transport with the cavalry consisted of Cape buck wagons with spans of 10 mules, or else Scotch carts with spans of six mules. Various patterns of two and four-wheeled carts and wagons were at times with the column, but on the whole the Cape buck wagon proved the best suited for the work. Its authorised load (including four days' forage of the team) was 3,400 lbs., but the actual weight carried was frequently in excess of this. The Scotch cart is supposed to carry 1,700 lbs. (with its mules' forage), but it was unnecessarily heavy, and from want of carrying space was considered unsuited for a bulky load.

Four-wheeled transport was on general grounds preferable to two-wheeled. With an equal number of mules a heavier load can be moved, fewer boys are required, and less space is taken up on the road.

In the earlier stages of the advance, the orders as to requisitioning were not so definite as they became later, when it was recognised that transport left behind at farms was invariably utilised by the Boers, and when the wastage of transport from breakages, etc., had to be replaced from the country. After a time many ox wagons were seen mixed up in the mule columns, and flying squadrons of Cape-carts hung about the flanks of the transport column.

Wagons sent out from home were unsuited to the hot climate, and the wood (particularly naves of wheels) suffered severely. At De Aar in January 1900, nearly all wheels received from home had to be re-tyred, and even then were a constant trouble owing to shrinkage of wood. In the march from De Aar to Orange River one transport company, which was equipped at the former place, had to remove no less than from 15 to 20 wheels at the end of the day's march, and entirely submerge them in water to swell the wood to enable the wagon to run next day.

Of imported wagons, undoubtedly the Australian and Canadian were the best, and it was extraordinary to see how with their light wheels and frames they got over the country, and stood the hard usage of long distances over broken ground.

Comparing the regimental with the later system of transport we may sum up as follows:—

In favour of Regimental system.—1. Independence of units to move at short notice.

2. More supervision possible, and accounts of vehicles and animals simpler.

3. The unit always takes care to put an officer in charge of transport on whom it can rely for hard work and energy.

Against Regimental Transport. — 1. When units are stationary a great waste of transport takes place.

2. Repairs are more difficult, as regiments have no skilled men for repairing harness and vehicles and often even not cold shoers.

3. Scale of baggage always exceeded.

In favour of the later system. — 1. More transport available.

2. Troops able to move further from the base.

3. Chain of supply rendered easier.

4. Casualties more easily adjusted.

Against.—1. Supervision on line of march not so complete.

2. Present establishment of Army Service Corps not large enough to carry out both supply and transport.

Convoys, Mule Loads.—The great difficulty experienced by transport officers, particularly under the later system of transport, was the absolute disregard of orders in respect of loading vehicles. As the march advanced the loads gradually increased while the animals deteriorated. Stray bits of furniture and curios were added daily, and in many cases owing to careless packing great delays occurred by loads shifting and falling off.

Marching.—There was a tendency, showing an absence of method, mainly due to want of orders from the senior transport officer, to inspan transport too early; and cases are well known where animals have stood inspanned and waiting one and a-half to two hours before the last wagon moved off, which lessened their grazing, and tired the animals before starting.

Grazing and Feeding.—The mule luckily is almost a freak of nature in its capacity for hard work on short rations, and was always the first animal on whom to practice a saving in food, for days together sometimes going without any grain whatever. In the end they suffered, and heavy mortality overtook them. The care of their grazing was largely left to conductors and boys; the former were often too lazy and the latter usually too tired to carry out their duties, and frequently neglected to drive the mules to the better veldt. There was also an objectionable practice in the earlier part of the campaign of grazing mules tied together four abreast, when, if one mule was off his feed, all the rest were hindered from filling themselves.

Escorts.—Until our arrival at Pretoria escorts for convoys were more a matter of form than a necessity; and until a few disasters had occurred, the irksome and difficult task of escorting miles of mule wagons was regarded more as a nuisance than as a post of responsibility.

Maps and Guides.—A great point to be observed in future is the necessity of furnishing transport officers of all ranks with trustworthy maps and guides. Too often it happened that officers were sent out in charge of transport totally unprovided with them, entailing loss of time and extra wear and tear on the animals. Communication between main bodies and flanking parties with the convoys was too often neglected. Signallers, heliographs, and field telegraphs were almost entirely reserved for the fighting troops, so that the convoys were frequently left to themselves. A certain proportion of Army Service Corps men should be trained in signalling. At present, at home, no such training is available, and officers and men of the corps are prohibited from making themselves proficient in this most important subject.

Ox Convoys.—The ox is an excellent transport animal where water and grass are abundant, provided that he is worked at proper hours and allowed time to rest and graze. He is not suitable for fast work over a country where these conditions are not found. Although, naturally, movements

of transport must conform to tactical necessities, there was an immense amount of unnecessary work given to these animals through want of method. At one town in the Eastern Transvaal, a column of about 200 wagons started off, all the transport officers being novices at the work, and the march having been ordered for ten in the morning the oxen stood inspanned at that hour, while the last wagon did not leave the ground till half-past twelve. The general officer commanding expected the oxen to be grazed before the march started and on reaching camp; and when we consider that it was winter, and that the ox will not rise till warmed by the sun and will not graze after sundown, the casualties of that column can be imagined. Further, both in Pretoria and Bloemfontein the oxen did the greater part, if not the whole, of the garrison work while the mules rested, besides working for days together at the various drifts to assist the mules.

Escorts.—Escorting ox wagons was even more irksome than escorting mule wagons as the pace was much slower. During the march to Pretoria with Lord Roberts's army the escorts detailed were purely nominal, as is shown by the escort of the 200 wagons captured at Riet River. This consisted of one company of the Gordon Highlanders and one company of mounted infantry for, roughly speaking, five miles of road. Frequently a column of 12 miles of ox wagons followed in rear of the army, and the escort was never really sufficient for one quarter of its length. Fortunately, indeed, for us, the Boers were busily engaged in front, or it might at times have gone hard with our forces.

Cavalry.—It has been plainly shown from the war that whatever system of transport be decided upon for future campaigns, the cavalry must have a totally separate equipment and organization. To hamper a body of fast-moving troops by an ox train is so disastrous as to thoroughly cripple the whole action of the force. General French, in marching from Machadodorp to Pretoria, practically had to keep a narrow front and devote his whole attention to guard his line instead of being able to harass the enemy.

In the future, the cavalry must be equipped with a special vehicle chosen for lightness and ease of draught rather than durability. The wagon should be a spring wagon capable of conveying 2,000 lb. with food for the team, and should be drawn by a liberal scale of mules or ponies, so that if casualties occur to the animals, the wagons can still easily proceed with a reduced team. A supply column of a slightly stronger

vehicle to carry a load of 3,000 lb. should be the connecting link between the column and the rail or supply park, and the officers of this transport should be the most experienced and capable men of the transport service.

Lessons.—Thus the lessons to be learnt from the campaign may be taken as follows :—

(1) The vehicles for cavalry transport must be light and easy of draught with a large team of animals.

(2) A special supply column for the cavalry must be added.

(3) The Army Service Corps must be increased to enable that branch to control supplies and transport on service, which must on no account be separated.

(4) The defence of convoys must be made a more important feature in military training at home.

(5) Regiments should be trained in packing and loading vehicles constantly, and commanding officers made to understand that disregard of loading-tables will ensure severe penalties.

(6) Officers' baggage and mess kit must be rigidly kept down to scale.

(7) Manœuvres at home are the very worst forms of training when regiments are allowed to have messes equipped by Whiteley and the Army and Navy Stores in the baggage train. Manœuvres should be carried out more on a service scale and under service conditions, officers living on their rations (which should be issued the same as on service) and baggage cut down to service limits.

(8) Maps and guides and full information must be given to all transport officers and officers of supply columns.

(9) Signalling by day and night should be made part of the training in the Army Service Corps.

(10) Mules should not be fastened with reims (strips of hide) but with chains, which are cheaper in the end.

(11) If the regimental system is to be adhered to, all regiments should have a certain number of men trained annually with the Army Service Corps in repairing harness and vehicles, and regimental transport officers should go through the army veterinary course.

(12) The vehicles of the country (except for cavalry) and the animals of the country are the best.

(13) Two-wheeled vehicles are unsuitable, except in those countries where their use is in ordinary times extensive.

(14) In a campaign all vehicles and animals captured mus be at once handed to the Transport or Remount Departt

ments. Too many cases occurred of units obtaining wagons and keeping them for private use, thereby depriving the transport of vehicles and animals, and increasing an already enormous transport train.

It is superfluous to praise the officers and men of the Army Service Corps, as their efficiency has been well proved to the public. At the beginning of the campaign the transport was worked on the sealed pattern, and with the exception of insufficiency was universally praised. Latterly the officers of the corps, deprived of half of their personel to make new companies, and mixed with senior and junior officers of other corps, many of whom did not know and did not profess to know anything of transport, found their work grievously increased; all the more, therefore, must we appreciate the success with which they performed it.

With regard to the supply branch, it is known that they worked successfully throughout, and by dint of united effort did justice to their training and organisation. It is only to be regretted that, seriously undermanned as they are, the new army reforms have allowed no material increase in the officers and men.

Every opportunity for perfected development should be given to the Army Service Corps, which bears the same relation to the army as the engines to a battleship. No matter how good the guns, gunners, torpedoes, etc. may be, unless the engines and stokers do their work smoothly and well the ship is an easy prey to its foes.

In warfare, work at the base and on the line of communication is always accepted with reluctance, yet we must remember that it is on the unseen and often unappreciated efforts of these troops and individuals that much of the success of a campaign depends, and the South African campaign has been no exception.

THE END.

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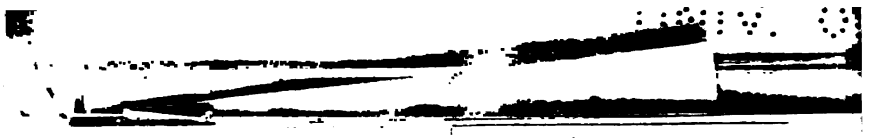

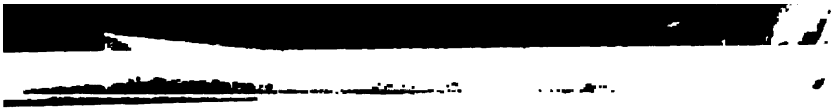

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1, 2. DISTANT VIEWS OF CAVALRY ON THE MARCH.

3. GUNS AND WAGONS KEEPING TO THE ROAD, THE CAVALRY ACROSS THE VELDT.

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1. HASTY DRINK AT A DAM EN ROUTE.
2. LANCERS ON THE MARCH.

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1. ROYAL HORSE ARTILLERY ON THE MARCH.

2. ROYAL HORSE ARTILLERY GOING INTO ACTION.

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1. HOISTING WAGONS UP A STEEP PLACE.

2. AMMUNITION WAGON CROSSING THE AWKWARD GROUND OF A DONGA.

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1. TAPPING THE TELEGRAPH WIRE BY MEANS OF THE FIELD TELEGRAPH INSTRUMENT.

2. CALLING UP A BODY OF MEN SUSPECTED AS THE ENEMY BUT POSSIBLY A DETACHMENT OF OUR TROOPS.

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1. CUTTING THE TELEGRAPH WIRE.

2. A CAMP EXPEDIENT: IMPROVISED PATROL TENT; LANCES IN PLACE OF POLES.

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1. STAMPING OUT A VELDT FIRE—A COMMON SIGHT.

2. HERDING CAPTURED SHEEP.

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1. CAVALRY ADVANCED PATROL CROSSING THE VAAL RIVER.

2. SUPPORTS TO CAVALRY ADVANCED PATROL CROSSING THE VAAL RIVER.

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1. WEIGHTED UP TROOP-HORSE.

2. STUBBORN RESIGNATION.

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1. STILL IN ACTIVE EMPLOY—THE HUNGARIAN REMOUNT.

2. PREPARED TO DIE IN HARNESS—THE INDIAN REMOUNT.

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1. SPECIMEN OF VELDT PONY AND DAM.

2. COUPLED MULES WATERING WITH DIFFICULTY.

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1. AT LAST A HALT AND A FEVERED DRINK.

2. THE TRACK OF THE ARMY.

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Freehand Sketches showing roughly some of General French' and the enemy's positions in the engagements betwee the Vaal River and Barberton, May-October, 190

1. (*a*) Viljoen's Drift across the Vaal, showing adjoining hills, May 24th ... see pages 242–24
   (*b*) Kalkheuvel Ambush, June 3rd ... „ „ 266–26

2. Engagement at the Klipriversberg, May 28th ... ... see page 25

3. Advance towards Doornkop from the Klipriversberg on the forenoon of May 29th ... ... „ „ 25

4. Advance from Florida to Klipfontein, north of Johannesburg across the Witwatersrand, May 30th ... ... „ „ 25

5. Action at Kameelfontein, being part of the Diamond Hill operations, June 11th and 12th ... ... see pages 276–28

6. Reconnaissances beyond Derdepoort in the first weeks of July and July 16th „ „ 288 & 306–30

7. (*a*) General French's line of advance beyond Belfast by Zwartkoppies to Waterval Onder ... ... „ „ 345–34
   (*b*) General French crosses the Devil's Knuckles by a precipitous track into Barberton Valley, September 13th ... „ „ 379–38

8. General Mahon's engagement at Geluk, October 15th ... ... „ „ 395–39